

July 26, 2020 - 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost - Sermon notes

Genesis 29:15-28, Psalm 105:1-11, Romans 8:26-39, Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

The art of communicating an idea that is unfamiliar to the listeners often employs the use of images which are familiar to the listener in order to convey something about that unfamiliar idea. Such is the case when speaking about the Kingdom of Heaven. Many of us may have some definite opinions about the concept of this kingdom but we have no way of really knowing about it because, by definition, it exists elsewhere at this time. In his preaching Jesus announced that the 'kingdom of heaven had come near' but it was still something foreign to the experience of the average human. This is one of the reasons Jesus used parables. He was trying to convey something helpful when it came to understanding something about the kingdom of heaven. None of the illustrations does a complete job of describing what the kingdom of heaven is like by itself any more than the picture of a snow covered house does a complete job of describing Canada. Jesus used parables to try to communicate some important aspects regarding the kingdom of heaven and the section of Matthew's Gospel assigned for today contains 5 distinct images which Jesus used in order to convey something about the kingdom. None of the individual examples does a complete job of explaining the kingdom of heaven but taken together a more complete picture emerges. Even this picture is incomplete but taking the parables together helps us obtain a sketch of the kingdom of heaven and so, over the next few minutes, let us explore some of the things which Jesus brought to the attention of his listeners through his words as recorded in Matthew's Gospel.

The need for the use of parables comes from, in part, the fact that the subject matter is not something that exists on earth at this time. The kingdom of heaven is that realm in which God's will is perfectly performed and obeyed. This is not the state of affairs on Earth right now but it is the promise of God that one day the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth will be united. Jesus repeatedly proclaimed that the 'kingdom of heaven was coming near' and through his actions the effects of that kingdom were seen on earth. But how was it to arrive? In 5 short parables Jesus declares some important aspects of that arrival and the first illustration in this list is that of a small seed.

The kingdom of heaven arrives as a small seed which, when planted, grows into a bush in which the birds of the air can make their homes. Sometimes people view the arrival of God's kingdom as a much more dramatic event. Images of armies or falling celestial objects are used

but in this version of the arrival things are much quieter and more gradual. While still a stupendous and dramatic action the growth of a seed is slow and somewhat unnoticeable. “The smallest of all seeds”, Jesus observes, “grows into a shrub which provides a nesting location for the birds of the air. The arrival of God’s kingdom and its growth and influence will be gradual and will bless some portion of God’s creation.

“The birds of the air will nest in its branches”. This speaks of benefits which come in addition to whatever fruit the seed is designed to produce. From the smallest of seeds comes added benefit to society. We see that in effect from time to time in our own lives. I recall the very humble beginnings of a wonderful ministry that took place at St. Luke’s Cathedral some years ago. From time to time people accessed a food bank that was situated at the Cathedral. One of the volunteers began to invite those people to come to the Parish Hall on another day in order to learn how to ‘stretch’ their budget. Only a few of those invited responded but each week this small group would meet to talk about some of the techniques available to extend a person’s buying power. They discussed and practiced various recipes, shared methods of patching clothes and re-purposing used items, and encouraged one another to carry on. The group remained small but, for a time, it had a tremendous impact on the lives of those who attended and, through them, on the lives of others. This kind of story can be found in all of our Churches in one form or another and it is an illustration of a small mustard seed being planted and providing shade and food for others.

“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast”. Flour, water, honey, salt, and yeast are mixed together to produce a tasty concoction called bread. Without the yeast the product still has flavour but the texture and much of the aroma will be missing. The yeast produces the leavening action needed to ‘puff up’ the dough but the structure produced by the gluten strands in the kneaded dough is what holds on to the gas bubbles. The kingdom of heaven provides the leavening action on the structure that exists in our lives. It brings an extra and wonderful texture to something that already tastes good but can be made even better.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field.” “The kingdom of heaven is like a fine pearl” Not only is the kingdom like a small seed which grows into a bush to provide shelter and its like a bit of yeast which adds flavour and texture to the dough the kingdom is also something to be desired. A treasure is only a treasure to those who have a desire for that treasure. Not everyone would sell everything they own in order to obtain a beautiful pearl but if

the kingdom of heaven is something a person desires then no cost will be too great in order to obtain it according to this parable. The kingdom of heaven invites this level of devotion to those who value it highly. Do we value the arrival of this kingdom in our lives in this way? Most of us would give a qualified 'yes' which means that most of us are missing out on enjoying the fullness of the kingdom. Allowing our hearts to grow in love for God and for God's kingdom will lead us to wonderful fulfillment and joy. We are asked to take a leap of faith.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a net for catching fish". As Jesus went about teaching and demonstrating the effects of the kingdom there were those who were caught up into the band of disciples. People left their lives behind, at least temporarily, in order to follow the man from Nazareth. In this way the effects of God's kingdom were like a net. Not everyone who heard or saw Jesus were caught but some were. Not everyone who hears a message at a Church service are caught up into the fellowship but some are. Not everyone who experiences the wonder of God's kingdom on earth is caught but some are. Added to this image are Jesus' words about the fact that some of the fish are kept while others are thrown away. It appears that when the kingdom of heaven appears in our lives it will attract some people but some of those people will end up being removed. This image is somewhat the same as the weeds and wheat from last week or the parable of the sower from a few weeks ago. Not everyone who is touched by the kingdom of heaven ends up being drawn in.

A seed, some yeast, a treasure and a pearl and a fishing net. Images that are familiar used to bring meaning to something we cannot see or fully perceive. As we think about these images it may be necessary for us to make some decisions in order to experience as full an effect from the kingdom of heaven as is possible in this world. Jesus came in order to bring about the kingdom and we are told that one day the kingdom of heaven will be on earth. May our daily prayers, as they include the petition 'thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven' take on a different focus based on this reflection. May we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. May we experience the joy that comes from knowing that nothing will ever separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus and from the fact that we are more than conquerors through our connection with Jesus. As our week unfolds I pray that evidence of the kingdom of heaven will be part of that week.