

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46, 52  
The Kingdom of God is Like  
Sunday February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016

I heard a story recently about two shoe salesmen who were sent to the same village to sell shoes. When they got there they found out that no one in the village wore shoes.

The first salesman called up his boss and said, "I'm coming home and sending back all my shoe samples. It's hopeless. No one in this village wears shoes."

The second salesman called up his boss and said, "Wow, what an opportunity. Send me all the shoes you've got. We're going to make a killing in this village. No one wears any shoes!"

My friends the events and circumstances of life can very much encourage us, or discourage us depending on how we look at them.

Personally, at times our spiritual lives can seem hopeless and our purpose for living lost. There are many circumstances personally and on a religious Church level that attempt to discourage us and we can approach life like salesman #1 or salesman #2. These parables we read today take the salesman 2 approach.

These parables we read today are parables of great hope and comfort. In fact one theologian wrote about them and said, "Jesus is saying to his disciples and his followers today, **that there must be no discouragement, that they must serve and witness in their own situations, that each must be the small beginning from which the kingdom grows** until kingdoms of earth finally become the kingdom of God." (Barclay)

I believe, I can't emphasize enough, the importance of the Kingdom of God. The last couple of Sunday I've spoken about the DNA of the Bible being Covenant and Kingdom; and that the core of our faith is Covenant and Kingdom. It is in "Kingdom" that we live out our faith.

“Kingdom” was the core of Jesus’ preaching. Jesus’ message is summarized in Mark 1:15 which we see in the offering slot in our bulletin. **“The time has come,” Jesus said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”**

The Kingdom of God is indeed near. It is here. It was and is present in the person of Jesus Christ. Wherever Jesus was the Kingdom was present. Entrance into the Kingdom comes through an invitation to enter into relationship with Jesus which challenges us to live in a new way in this world. It is Kingdom living. It is living with faith and hope and optimism. The Kingdom of God is not something that can be “figured out” or “understood.” It must be discovered, because it already exists. And when we find it; it seizes us! Its inestimable value possesses us and we use all we have to then possess it.

You may feel like your faith is small and powerless, even worthless. You may feel weak and unimportant. You may feel your church is small and ineffective in the face of massive societal and cultural trends, but what is hidden in you, in us is powerful and valuable and will inevitably overcome all for we are part of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Our first two parables, the mustard seed and yeast, speak of things that are very small but grow large and tall.

The mustard seed is a proverbial reference to the smallest thing in Jesus’ day and even today.



Mustard seeds, one of which you can see on the screen grow into large bushes up to 10 feet tall, but not trees. Here’s a field of mustard bushes.



Jesus' reference to them as "trees" was to capture his hearer's attention and make a point. Trees in Jesus' day represented kingdoms or empires. Birds represented other nations.



The image here was that the kingdom of heaven would grow so large from such an unexpected place that the nations of the world would flock to it. Its growth would be beyond something that is natural (a large bush) into something that was supernatural (a tree). This was great hope and encouragement to a small group of disciples in a far corner of the Roman Empire.

The parable of the yeast speaks of a bit of yeast being hidden in a large quantity of dough. "Sixty pounds of flour" was about the size of a bushel basket. It was a huge amount of dough! It was enough to feed 100-150 people, and here was one little woman, and a tiny little inadequate bit of yeast transforming this dough into an enormous quantity of tasty life-giving bread.

In Jesus' day, in parables and storytelling, yeast was a symbol of the "unclean and evil". So what was Jesus saying?

What is the Kingdom of Heaven like?

Jesus was telling us that where the Kingdom of Heaven breaks out here on earth the beginnings are insignificant and often denigrated in comparison to the miraculous endings.

The result of God moving and working with and through His people is beyond everyone's reasonable expectations.

Martin Luther said, "When God begins a thing it always looks as if nothing will come of it."

A mustard seed becomes a tree? An inadequate bit of yeast leavens a whole lot of dough? Yes!

About the greatest work of the Kingdom of God was an “unclean” Jewish carpenter, a criminal, was hung on a cross and became the Savior of the world.

When you are part of the kingdom of heaven that’s what happens to you! If you let it, if you seek it! The small faltering, hesitant faith you have will transform you, your religious community and eventually our entire society.

God will transform you and use you as part of the kingdom to bring about great good, great things for God, great things for God’s glory!

Now we might not see it. It may be hidden in the soil, or in the dough, or in the field. But the kingdom of heaven is here active, working and transforming ourselves and the world.

It’s here-like a treasure hidden in a field and found by accident, or a pearl of great price deliberately sought after.

One pastor wrote, “The kingdom of heaven is here, now. You just can’t see it. BUT if you make an effort to share his (God’s) love, be his hands and feet, you will not only see it, you will experience it. We are not called to save the world-Jesus has done that-we are here called to be our rabbi’s hands and feet.” (DPS site Hobbes 7/22/08)

Say this with me, “**we are not called to save the world, Jesus did that.**”

We are called as that early theologian I quoted said, “**to serve and witness in our own situations.**” **to be our rabbi’s hands and feet.**

My friends when we do this we enter into the kingdom of heaven. When we seek out and do our small part of serving and witnessing in our small part of the world we enter into the kingdom of heaven.

And what’s the kingdom of heaven worth? It’s worth our all.

The parables of the treasure in the field and the pearl of great price show this.



In the first a man is plowing the field and finds a buried treasure. This was a common thing in the Mid East where there were no banks. People would hid their treasure in the ground and often forget where it was hidden, or die without leaving a map. Such buried treasure is the source of most of the ancient coins that are found and sold today.

By Rabbinic law this plowman didn't have to buy the field to legally possess the treasure, but he did. In Rabbinic law it was finder's keepers. Some feel he would have bought the field, though, to remove all doubt of legal possession.

But I feel, Jesus said he bought it, is because **the kingdom of heaven "inspires us to give something for it.** The reality and beauty of the kingdom of God demands a response from us." We just can't find and experience it without doing something in return. It was such a treasure the plowman gave his all for it as did the Merchant.

In the Parable of the Pearl of great price the merchant was seeking the kingdom of heaven and when he found that great pearl he gave his all to possess it.

My friends, to serve and witness in our own situation is to do the work and will of God where we are at, just as we are, in the here and now. When we seek to do the work and will of God we enter into the kingdom of heaven.

And the kingdom of heaven is worth our all. That is why at times we sing the song, "I Surrender All." When we give God all that we are, all that we have, all that we ever will be then God takes that and transforms it from the small offering it actually is into something great and large and beautiful.

But I must emphasize to enter the kingdom of heaven to possess this great treasure, this great pearl it means we must let go of everything to obtain it.

At some point in our own life we must cash it all in for God. God asks for it all to enter into the kingdom of Heaven. Think of your dearest possessions (and relationships with others don't count because you can't possess another), your greatest hopes and dreams, your deepest fears of what life might become. We must surrender all in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

We must surrender all!

And for those who fear and hesitate at that please hear the last parable.

**“Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasures what is new and what is old.”**

When we give all to God, as worthless as we think it is, or as rich and powerful: God will transform it. When we give our talents, time and treasure to God, God transforms them into something even greater.

God takes the old that is us, our gifts and talents whatever they may be, our work, our retirement; God takes them and transforms them into something new.

Retired teachers and administrators and business men and women have their skills transformed into the service of God in the church.

An abandoned military missile site becomes a place of ministry and mission.

The many older members of this congregation have been trained for a lifetime for the Kingdom of Heaven. There are retired educators, teachers, professors, administrators. There are retired CEOs, managers, electricians, tradesmen and women. There are moms and

grandmas and great-grandmas who know the most fundamental action of the Kingdom of God, and that is to love.

What is needed is a dream or vision. You are never too old or too young to dream. Our senior members have set up an endowment that's first function will be to finance two interns this coming summer.

Our youth are busy working with adults on an Arts Camp this coming summer. There are potters and painters and singers who are going to catch that vision and join with them. Barbara Sherman is leading that kingdom area.

We have a craft show that went from a conversation to a dream that will become a reality in March. We have a person with a calling to ministry and prayer that is becoming a prayer shawl and blanket ministry. Our Stephen ministers are taking Holy Communion to our shut-ins who in great loving detail have recently been identified to be cared for. Our Long Range Task Force is meeting soon to discern God's vision for this place.

What is your dream and vision? It may be small and seem odd or unusual like a mustard seed becoming a tree. You are never too old. The prophet Joel, quoted in Acts 2 wrote,

“In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men (and women) will see visions,  
your old men (and women) will dream dreams.

God takes us just the way we are. God uses the gifts and talents that we have when we come to Jesus and transforms those gifts to do great good.

My friends do not be discouraged on any level. Take hope in the inevitability of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Take hope that your efforts, no matter how small or feeble or odd you may think them to be will be taken by God and used in a most miraculous way.

And in the end, when you can no longer do anything for God, simply be with God in prayer and relationship. For like our children and grandchildren in the end it matters not what they do for us, but that they are with us. It's the same with God!

Take hope for one day God's kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen!