

Scripture Readings:

Romans 8:26-29

Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

Dandelion Gospel

Anyone out there tired of parables yet? Clearly Matthew is trying to get us to listen and pay attention. At some point this summer, in the series of sermons we hear we are supposed to get a nugget of truth about the Kingdom of Heaven. But perhaps the danger when one hears these messages over and over is one just let them pass on by, they are no longer a story, nugget or parable that strikes us as profound or shocking. Rather they have become simply the mustard seed, the soil, the pearl, the bread, the fish...and the list goes on.

And yet perhaps Jesus' tells so many parables in a row because he knows everyone connects with a different story and so that he continues with the hope that we might finally connect with a certain story or illustration. We know that different analogies, symbols and methods connect with each of us in a variety of ways. "You never know what might click for you, when the connection will happen for your faith, for what you believe. What illustration, what analogy will resonate? Each day is different when it comes to being a disciple, isn't it?"

Maybe there's a logic in Matthew, or better, a logic about Jesus.

After all, how does one depict the kingdom of heaven? The possible pictures of the kingdom of heaven are certainly not exhausted by Matthew, not even by Jesus. No one impression will suffice."¹

Karoline Lewis shares "Several years ago, Starbucks Coffee launched a campaign called "The Way I See It." Various quotes from different sources were printed on the coffee cups. I am not sure of the exact marketing strategy behind the promotion or if it was successful, but I do recall remembering and writing down "The Way I See It" #230:

"Heaven is totally overrated. It seems boring. Clouds, listening to people play the harp. It should be somewhere you can't wait to go, like a luxury hotel. Maybe blue skies and soft music were enough to keep people in line in the 17th century, but Heaven has to step it up a bit. They're basically getting by because they only have to be better than Hell." -- Joel Stein, columnist for the LA Times

¹ Lewis, Karoline workingpreacher.org

How we imagine what the kingdom of heaven is like depends a lot on what we need the kingdom of heaven to be, which frequently hinges on factors we'd rather ignore... Our language about the kingdom of heaven tends to be attached to how we think God should act and not how God has already acted. Our assumptions about the kingdom of heaven rely heavily on our system of rewards and not on God's choice to bless."

So I wonder... How might you imagine the kingdom of heaven (or the kindom as I prefer to call it). For instance if you were to try to imagine a parable for us today that described the kingdom of heaven what might you say? Why don't you take a moment of to and discuss with the folks around you. What does your kingdom of heaven look like - in other words how expansive or precious is it? Folks from Squamish United know I like the parable of the mustard seed and have heard me use its example time and time again. But this week I thought of a new example - so let me get you started with my new parable.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a dandelion that a child picked and blew into the field; When those seeds rooted beautiful flowers like sunlike sprung forth all over the field. They provided medicine and food for all who gathered them."

Now before I go on to explain a little more about my Dandelion Gospel - I wonder if you might take a moment to think of a sample parable. Don't think too too hard - remember every analogy, simile, metaphor or parable usually has a down side if you over annualize so let's not do that, and please don't judge another person's parable. Take mine for example (I know not everyone wants their world consumed with Dandelions - that's not the point - is it)... Take only a few minutes and then I will invite anyone who wants to to share their parable...

Dandelion seeds are blown in the wind. We don't generally value dandelions - some people even refer to them as a nuisance - but how mighty a flower they are! Those little seeds from one flower can fill a whole yard with new dandelions. Their seeds are like little parachutes that when caught by the wind they can fly quite a distance. As I read only briefly I learned that every part of the Dandelions can be used for purpose of food or medicine. Just like the dandelion Even the smallest acts of love, can bring about great change that impacts the world.

Reading and "interpreting the Bible is not simply accepting its truths, but is about embodying the way in which truth can be revealed -- in conversation, in inquiry, in creativity. And isn't that the nature of a parable? The parables don't argue for truth itself but show that what is true about God and about ourselves might be disclosed in the act of our wrestling with, resisting, and being pulled into truth.

In the end, be assured that the reason Jesus spends so much time explaining the kingdom of heaven is because we need to be reminded that it's here even when it seems so excruciatingly absent. The promise of the parables about the kingdom of heaven is that even when the kingdom is not seen, it is near."

I think that is the message of the passage we read from Roman's this morning. Frederick Buechner puts it this way "We are above all things loved - that is the good news of the gospel - and loved not just the way we turn up on Sundays in our best clothes and on our best behavior and with our best feet forward, but loved as we alone know ourselves to be, the weakest and shabbiest of what we are along with the strongest and gladdest."... "In the long run, whether you call on his or don't call on him, God will be present with you."²

Quoting Buechner again "What is both Good and New about the Good News is the wild claim that Jesus did not simply tell us that God loves us even in our wickedness and folly and wants us to love each other the same way and to love him too, but that if we will let him, God will actually bring about this unprecedented transformation of our hearts himself."³

Parables are to give witness to our faith and life expression. Let me encourage you to continue to make your own parables - feel free to send them my way - I love it when people do. This is an offering of testimony to what the kingdom of God is to you. And that kind of expanding Dandelion gospel is what the holy desires for all the world. that Holy love may touch every corner, every soul, every heart, every life with abundant grace, love and acceptance.

Amen.

² originally from Now and Then, later in Listening to Your Life

³ originally published in Wishful Thinking and later in Beyond Words