

**SCRIPTURE READINGS
Matthew 13:31-33; 44-52**

Finding the Kindom

Eugene Peterson in “the Message” put’s verse 31 this way. “God’s kingdom is like a pine nut that a farmer plants. It is quite small as seeds go, but in the course of years it grows into a huge pine tree, and eagles build nests in it.”¹

My interpretation of these parables is something like God’s presence is like a weed that quickly produces sufficient plants to overwhelm a field with its roots down deep, and its branches bursting forth. And God desires greatness for us just as a mother desires greatness for her child. Or The surprise of God is like putting on an old pair of jeans and finding a fifty in the pocket. The kindom presence of God is everywhere we just need to discover it.

A common question I am asked as a clergy person is “Who is God.” My response depends on who is asking. In fact it wasn’t all that long ago that I was out walking with a friend and she turned to me and asked “Who is God?” “I don’t know” I laughed somewhat thankful I was in a situation I felt safe enough to give the honest answer.

It was an honest answer because one of the most difficult things about faith and believing in God is describing him, or her, or it. And when someone asks why or how I believe my response is somewhat similar to the first - the fact is “I don’t know how not to.”

You see I’ve tried to deny God, and turn away from my faith and that has never worked very well for me. Yes, I like many had a period of time where I thought I was smarter than God or believing or faith. And yet any time I try to live without God or faith I find myself struggling. When I deny God I end up wondering who I am.

I think that is likely why Jesus often speaks to us in metaphors and parables. He uses ordinary everyday images to challenge us, and show us how to live. Barbara Brown Taylor says “the truth is that it is impossible to speak directly about holy things.”²

And yet somehow we try, because we want to share it when we have had a moment when our breath was taken away by creation, or moments when we have felt ourselves bursting with an inner joy as we have sung a song, or a even moments of deep peace in a time of

¹ Matthew 13:31 – The Message

² Taylor, BB “The Seeds of Heaven.” Pg. 40

struggle. And so we talk about things that we know. We use images like we live in the body of God – we are a part of the holy presence or we are the hands and feet of God in the world because then we get a glimpse of the kingdom.

Just like in our parable sound bites today when Jesus tries to teach us about who God is. Jesus uses ordinary things to open our eyes. There are some similarities in each of the metaphor's Jesus used about the kingdom of God. The mustard seed, the yeast and the pearl are all tiny things that produce much and like the treasure in the field or the fish caught in the sea they're hidden at first but once they are discovered they provide abundance for all that they touch.

Taylor says Jesus zings these parables at us “like scenes glimpsed through the windows of a fast-moving train...It is almost like he does not want us to think too much about them, like he does not want us to get stuck on any one of them but to be dazzled by the number and variety of things the kingdom of heaven is like.”³

The mustard seed and the yeast tell us that God's presence may not look very impressive at first. In fact mustard can be considered a weed and yeast is potentially a poisonous fungus. And yet one mustard seed quickly produces sufficient plants to overwhelm a field and that provides a place for the birds to rest in. It's pervasive it touches everything it can possibly reach.

Now, I don't know a lot about yeast but I know it is also pervasive. I recalling reading that yeast grew like a fungus on the windows of a warm kitchen and it would get used to make bread, but each loaf of bread would have a specific taste depending upon where it was baked or how the yeast was produced. Jesus uses the image of yeast because yeast grows naturally all around us, it is even in the air we breathe. It seems in surprising ways the kingdom of heaven is everywhere and it is potent and growing.

Another thing I have noticed about these metaphors of Jesus is that each of these small things provided something for others. The seed, the yeast and the treasure don't exist for their own sake, they exist to provide. When there is a seed there is something growing. God's presence is growing everywhere.

And yet it's hidden in the ground or the dough or in the field or the depths of the sea. “If the kingdom is like these, then it is not something readily apparent to the eye but something that must be searched for, something just below the surface of things waiting there to be discovered and claimed.”⁴

But when we discover it our whole world changes.

³ IBID

⁴ IBID

What does the man who discovers the treasure (which is the kingdom) do?
He sells everything he has to live with that treasure. This discovery changes his whole life. He discovers a new kind of wealth.

Each time God is discovered in the ordinary, lives are transformed. It's exciting, it's life giving. These parables tell us that when we encounter God everything is going to change. It may be unfortunate that we have heard these parables so many times because they might not have the same impact as they did the first time we heard them. That is why I think we need to constantly be asking ourselves and one another What are the signs of the kingdom today, where is it growing in the midst? And then we need to ask When we discover the kingdom how are we changed by it. It's not about Wow look at my treasure it's about look at how my life and the lives of those around me are transformed by encountering God.

Taylor says "It is the stuff legends are made of...it is exciting business, but where do we *begin looking?*

...it seems like we ought to start looking *for God* some place really holy, some place really extraordinary, like a medieval monastery, maybe, translating ancient texts with biblical scholars; or in the slums of Calcutta, bathing the sick and the dying with Mother Teresa. Maybe we should begin in the Holy Land, or at the Vatican...Then again it may not matter where we are exactly, as long as we keep our eyes open for extraordinary clues wherever we are – looking out for heavenly visions, listening out for heavenly voices. Because if the kingdom of heaven is hidden in this world, it is hidden *right here.*"⁵ What if the presence of God were right here? What if it were growing in our midst? Would we see it?

How about this image - The kingdom of God is like a person who is cured from a disease and goes out to raise money to provide medical research for those still struggling.

Brian McLaren tells a story about where he saw the kingdom of God represented as a feast. He says "Just today I met some folks from a church in Minneapolis who demonstrate this metaphor in a dramatic and fun way. A group of them gather on a street corner in a poor part of town. They take overturned trash cans, old pots and pans, and an assortment of drums and other percussion instruments and start creating a loud, joyful rhythm. Soon a crowd gathers. It's impossible not to smile when you hear the joyful music being made mostly from junk. Homeless folk and people from the neighborhood start dancing. Then the church members start distributing food – not in the somber style of a soup kitchen, but in the joyful atmosphere of a street party. They don't have to say a word really; they're demonstrating their message – that the kingdom of God is like a street party to which everybody is invited."⁶

⁵ IBID

⁶ McLaren, Brian "Found in Translation, Sojourners Magazine" March 2006

Where is the kingdom? How do we discover it? What is it like?

Perhaps “God has resorted to the oldest trick in the book and hidden it ...in plain view... like a silver spoon in the drawer with the stainless, like a diamond necklace on the bureau”⁷ of costume jewelry, like a person who really cares sitting in the pew next to you. The kingdom of heaven is mixed up in the things of everyday life in the smile of a child, or the hug of a friend. You don’t need a treasure map – the X marks the spot right here and now!

So when we don’t know how to speak of heavenly things and when we wonder what God is all about remember the kingdom of heaven can be described and found in these: men, women, children, friends, fields, mountains, birds, oceans, fish, bread and the list goes on. Like yeast that naturally grows all around us the kingdom of God is in the very air we breathe. And when we truly discover it, it will transform us!

Throughout this chapter Jesus asks “Are you listening?” Do you notice? Does it change you? Ask yourself where you discovering God today and how that discovery will bring new life to all you touch.

Because the kingdom of God is.... here
Amen.

⁷ Taylor, pg. 44