

“The Kingdom of God is like”
July 30, 2023 – Ninth Sunday after Pentecostal

Romans 8:26-39

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Jesus was a great storyteller. He told parables about the kingdom of God that opened up what God’s kingdom is like. It is like a tiny mustard seed that grows into a plant large enough and secure enough to harbour nesting birds. It is like a fish hiding in the deep water that should be fished out. It is like a pearl, like a treasure, hidden in the earth. It needs to be found. It is like yeast that one puts into the dough to make it rise.

And the people listening to the stories nod their heads in agreement. They can picture it. They have planted tiny mustard seeds and seen them grow to be twelve feet high. The smallest of seeds becomes a plant that becomes so large and secure that birds come and nest in its branches, hidden and safe where their young can be nurtured.

They can see themselves finding the pearl of great price. “It really is possible,” they are thinking to themselves. Palestine was infested with bandits and soldiers. The best way to ensure the safety of treasure was to bury it. “Why, there could be treasure buried in my own back yard,” they think, “and wouldn’t that be wonderful!” And that is what God’s kingdom is like. It could be mine. The kingdom of God is within my reach.

They heard as well the ominous tone in Jesus’ voice as he told them about their responsibility. The kingdom of God is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind. The net is a drag net that sweeps along the bottom of the sea and catches every imaginable kind of fish. At the end of the day they are sorted and some are thrown back. “Could I be found wanting at the end of time?” they wonder. “What do I have to do to make certain that I live as God wants me to?”

The parables that Jesus tells are meant to be unsettling, to overturn our certainty and startle us into insight and vision into God's kingdom. Jesus' purpose is to reveal what God's kingdom is about. It is a new kind of kingdom, a spiritual one that will include people of every nation and race. An inclusive kingdom that does not judge us by the colour of our skin, our sexual orientation, our intelligence, but rather by our faith in God and by how we have lived our lives. In other words, it is about our commitment to God. When we offer ourselves to God we find a deep sense of meaning and satisfaction in our ongoing life, but we become accountable to God.

As Christians we are searching for a great treasure. We are children of the kingdom, living in a kind of exile from it, discovering glimpses of it from time to time. It is worth the search, for it is a great treasure. But the search is costly. It will cost everything we have. But the transformation in our lives will make it a treasure worth having.

We have access to a treasure so great and awesome that it is enough to share with a hungry world. What a treasure we have in our Christian faith! What a treasure it is to know what it means to be loved by God, to be totally accepted by God. The tragedies and conflicts of life can discourage us but they do not change God's love for us. Failures and defeats may bother us, but they do not affect our relationship with God. As Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans, there is nothing – absolutely nothing – that can separate us from the love of God known to us in Jesus Christ. God's love and reconciling grace are forever. God's will is carried out through us. We are children of God.

Of what value is a sense of the presence of God, of the love of Christ, of the peace and meaning that such realities can bring into one's life? How much are these things worth? The ultimate truth is that these realities are worth everything. The Christian story is one of miracles. It is the story of lives turned around, of hope reborn, and of amazement at how, when we seek to live in accordance with God's will, great things can happen. May we find that great treasure! Amen.

Let us pray...

God of surprising love, you have called us to be your treasures, to be those who love and serve you by helping meet the needs of others. Jesus reminded us that we were like mustard seeds that could grow into mighty shelters for those who felt abandoned; that we were like yeast placed in flour which causes the whole dough to rise and to be fruitful for the nourishment of God's people, that we are also nets, cast into the unknown sea, gathering people for the Lord that they might be healed and saved. You place so much hope and trust in us. Give us courage and empower us to serve you boldly and joyfully. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.