

BIBLE READINGS: Romans 8:26-3:9 Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

SERMON

What is the kingdom of heaven like? Jesus seems to have a lot of different answers to that question. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. Or, it's like yeast. Or, it's like a treasure hidden in a field. Or, it's like a pearl of great value. Or, it's like a net thrown into the sea.

So which one is it? These descriptions of Jesus are metaphors—the kingdom of heaven, of course, is not a mustard seed. It's like a mustard seed. It seems that even Jesus was having trouble describing the kingdom of heaven. Perhaps that's because human language is inadequate to describe the kingdom of heaven, in the same way our various concepts of God can never really describe God. We think of God as a loving father, a protective mother, a shepherd, as the Creator, as the ground of our being, as a persistent lover. All of those things are true, but they still fail to describe God. That is because God is infinite, and we're not.

So what is the kingdom of heaven really like? Apparently it is a state of being rather than a kind of "place." In his letter to the Romans, Paul helps us understand what Jesus is saying. It's the kingdom of heaven when we don't know how to pray but the Spirit does our praying for us. It's the kingdom of heaven when all things somehow work together for good for those who love God. Eugene Peterson's interpretation of this in his paraphrase, "The Message," is spot on: "Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside us, helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good."

But that's not the only way that what Paul says describes the kingdom of God. It's the kingdom of God when we know that there is absolutely nothing—in this world or out of it—that can separate us from the love of Christ. Now, that's a treasure worth selling all that we have in order to possess.

Look at that description of the kingdom of God. "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

The kingdom of God is of such great value that anything else we may own pales in comparison. It would be easy to give up everything else in order to have it. But unlike the treasure hidden in the field, everyone can have it! God offers this treasure to each and every one of us. The love of Christ from which no one and nothing can separate us, is a treasure everyone is invited to possess.

Sometimes though, I wonder if we are either ready for or truly desire the treasure of God's kingdom. This is how one writer puts it.... "I would like to buy three dollars' worth of God, please – not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of God to make me love an Aborigine or support a refugee. I want ecstasy, not transformation. I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy three dollars' worth of God, please."

Jesus' parables about God's kingdom call us to transformation – we move on changed – different – out of control. Captured in the scary net of God's love.

These parables tell us that this “pearl of great price” is worth everything we have – that this heavenly kingdom is great beyond measure – yet hard to see. These parables tell us that God's kingdom grows in our hearts, yet it calls on us to grow God's kingdom in our community.

We discover as we begin to be transformed into the likeness of Christ that God's kingdom captures everyone – not just the good, not just the righteous – but everyone; you, me everyone.

Do we really want to claim the treasure – or hastily rebury it and move on quickly? Remember what Paul wrote? ... the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside us, helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God.

The fact is that you might have searched diligently for God's kingdom – or you might have just stumbled across it – or – you might have consciously attempted to avoid it. It doesn't matter – because the kingdom of heaven is like a net cast into the sea – we are all in the same place.

You don't know what to do? That's OK – the Holy Spirit will help you along. You're not sure who you are? The Holy Spirit knows us far better than we know ourselves. Lately I have felt at a loss – not sure what to do or who I was – but what kept me going was recognising that I was caught in God's net – I can struggle to try and get away – I can swim around and attempt to ignore it – but God has captured me and will not let me go.

God has captured all of you too – and God will not let you go.