

A Homily by the Rev. Dr. Renée Tembeckjian
Trinity Episcopal Church
26 July 2026
1 Kings 3:5-12; Psalm 119:129-136; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

“Thy Kingdom Come”

Whenever I’m home in New York, I like to sit in the little park outside my mother’s building and look up at the 5th floor kitchen window where she stood every morning, coffee in hand, watching the flurry of morning activity.

But getting her to that place was not easy. She firmly refused to leave her old apartment of 50+ years, where she and my dad happily lived and raised my brother and me.

Eventually, though, even she recognized that it was time to go, and to her profound surprise, she came to love her new place so much that every single time she walked into her front door, she would pause, heave a rather dramatic sigh, and say, “*My heaven.*”

Heaven – today’s Gospel is full of that word, as Jesus offers parable after parable -- that the kingdom of heaven is not some physical location in the by and by, but a way of living and being in the here and now. It is as near as common plant or loaf of rising bread or a pearl of great price.

The kingdom of heaven, he says, is *like a mustard seed* – tiny and seemingly insignificant, but with the capacity to grow up to 2000 times its size.

The kingdom of heaven is like *yeast put into three measures of flour* – a leavening from rotted bread, seemingly empty of life, yet able to raise dough enough for 100 loaves.

The kingdom of heaven is like *treasure hidden in a field* or *a pearl of such great value* that a seeker will give everything to attain it – because true wisdom often comes at a cost, a letting go, or a level of sacrifice.

There is encouragement in these parables about hidden wisdom, inherent possibility, and surprising new life.

Ah, but then... there is the parable about that *net*:

The kingdom of heaven *is like a net which catches every kind of fish, some good for feeding and others which should be thrown away* and set afire – an ominous metaphor about divine judgment, of reward and punishment – the sorting of human souls, where some will thrive and others will experience weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

With all due respect to generations who have taught or received the parable in this way, I imagine it otherwise:

In in the sea of this life, we often cast our nets to haul in those *fish of every kind*, as it were – wealth, status, stuff, position. The irony, of course, is that those personal nets, now so full and strained, ultimately weigh us down, literally and spiritually, as none of this sustains us and tends to prompt a vicious cycle of striving for even more.

And so, it is *we* who must do the sorting – to decide what is worth pursuing and what is not, to choose between what has integrity and what does not, to discern the difference between short-term gratification and long-term nourishment.

As for that warning about weeping and gnashing of teeth, we might simply dismiss that as an antiquated concept about hellfire and brimstone, but I think not.. ...

...because human suffering is not a metaphor. Weeping and worry, sorrow and regret, are very real dimensions of this human life. More than one of us has tasted tears upon realizing that we have focused far too much on what matters too little. Sometimes it is our own choices which condemn us...

...and there can be gnashing of teeth enough in that.

*Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables;
and without a parable he told them nothing.*

Sitting in that park outside my mother's window, it occurred to me that maybe there was a parable in *her* story – that the kingdom of heaven is *like a woman who believed she was too old for change and refused to move...until, in the letting go, she found surprising new life in the "heaven" of a new place.*

I don't imagine Jesus ever intended for one finite set of parables to be the end all. No good teacher would. He was not teaching *what* to say about the kingdom, but *how* to imagine it in vivid and relevant ways. Using images and metaphors from *his* own time and world, he invites us to find new images and new metaphors in *our* own time and world, so that a Gospel of hope will live forever.

Even more, we might consider Jesus himself as a *living* parable – because we see the kingdom of heaven when he heals the sick, welcomes an outsider, respects women, honors children, rebukes the haughty, or feeds the poor. His *actions* are windows through which we glimpse the dream of God in the here and now for the whole creation.

And we are called to do the same. By our own commitment to justice, mercy, and peace, by our stance against corruption, greed, and oppression, *we* become living parables through which the world might glimpse the dream of God through *us*....

...because the kingdom of heaven is like a follower of the Way of Love who actually *walks* the Way of Love.

Amen.