

WATCH SUNDAY WORSHIP ONLINE: standrewsleonardtowntn.org

Dear Friends,

In the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the yeast, we encounter images of the domain of God that nobody expected to hear. The big mustard seed tree growing from the tiny seed is like the comic post card illustrations of a farmer with a gargantuan tomato strapped to the back of a flatbed truck.

Nothing whatsoever can be compared in value to experiencing the Kingdom – not even buried “treasure” or “fine pearls.” It may start out small, but it will mushroom into a force to challenge unjust kingdoms and earthly powers.

Unless we set aside enough of our agenda to make room for its reality, it will remain a hidden dimension, effectively nonexistent. Thomas Merton used to say that in relationship to the Kingdom, *we are like a man riding on an ox looking for an ox.*

Pentecost Parables summon us to a new way of seeing, a new way of living, and a new way of centering. The teachings of Jesus do not come from the world conceptualized; they are drawn from the well of life itself. The living waters are here for us to drink and then rest on the grace of God.

Good and generous God, fountain of all wisdom, in Christ you have revealed your kingdom to us, a treasure hidden in a field, a pearl of great price. Grant us your Spirit's gift of discernment, that we may learn to distinguish aright between the passing wealth of this present world and the enduring value of your kingdom. Then make us swift to renounce all else to acquire the treasure you alone can bestow. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen. From Prayers for Sunday and Seasons, Year A, Peter J. Scagnelli, LTP, 1992.

Faithfully, Beverly+

The Collect

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the

things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Lessons: 1 Kings 3:5-12; Psalm 119: 129-136; Romans 8: 26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52.

A Reading from Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

Jesus put before the crowds another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

“The kingdom of heaven is like 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.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So, it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

Here ends the Reading.

GOD IS WAITING IN THE WEEDS

Many of us who read the parables in Matthew's Gospel may have trouble really holding on to them seeking their deeper meaning. After all, some we know are knocked down by the difficulties that began with the pandemic and by the uncertainties of what the next months will bring before we have a vaccine for coronavirus, not to mention the fact we all are still trying to stay virus free.

It is a challenge to suspend our worries and anxieties to think in the direction of dream and metaphor. God's parabolic truth, like metaphor, doesn't overpower; it suggests and evokes. Parables about the Kingdom of heaven are the handkerchiefs Jesus drops in his flirtation with the world.

And most of them are "glad tidings" Jesus paints in work pictures which call us to go to the end of the rainbow to find the "pot of gold" the kingdom contains – the infinite goodness and unconditional grace God longs to give away and that we, sadly, pay little attention to.

We must be struck by the earthy commonality that all these images express about how God's realm works in the world. First, they are anything but obscure – they are as "daily" and "down-to-earth" as life itself. Seeds. Pearls. Gold. Yeast, Nets. The message is that the Kingdom of heaven is not confined to the heavens, nor found just in the holy of holies, nor solely in the prayers of the devout. Rather, the Kingdom is within you. It is right under our nose, so to speak. Right where we wouldn't believe it would be.

Jesus' point is that unless you are looking for it – within yourself and within the social sphere – you are going to miss the Kingdom's reality. The eyes need to be opened to the unseen, life-saving reality in our midst. Otherwise, the bigness of the world blocks the awareness of the tiniest, but most treasured reality of all.

We are a people not wanting to be bothered by riddles on ultimate reality, or willing to take the time to pick up the gifts of grace that are repeatedly blown our way. But Jesus says this is the first and foremost thing we should do - seek the Kingdom and its righteousness above all else.

And the Kingdom is not a place in heaven but a relationship with God, a life of trust in the fresh initiative of God inaugurated through the life and ways of love of Jesus.

God is waiting in the weeds of our broken hearts and dreams and bruised virtue to bind up our wounds and mend the disease that separates us from ourselves and one another and from all that is holy. Do not seek the Kingdom of God any and every place but among the weeds of our lives. We look high and far out rather than gather up and hug close the weeds that we are.

If we attend to the natural world, to the world of everyday, to the world of trees and bread and work and unexpected happenings, we are able to penetrate into another reality. In our everyday worlds of love, work, joy, grief, boredom, silliness, pettiness, laughter, and smiles we can suddenly come upon evidence that God was right here before we were.

This is evidence of the Kingdom of God which makes us long for its fulfillment. That knowledge can fill our hearts with so much hope and thanksgiving even a such a time as the Pentecost Pandemic. Amen.