

*The Kingdom is, Like ...©*

**Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

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When I was a child, every Wednesday was bread baking day at my grandmother's house. Nanny had a potato yeast starter that she kept for many long years, and used some of it every week to bake some of the best bread I've ever eaten.

At one time, we lived just a block away and my mother would let me walk to her house as she watched me from the window. I would skip along on the sidewalk until I got about half way there and then there would be this wonderful smell permeating the air and I would pretty much break into a run after that to get to Nanny and Granddad's house. I knew that warm, homemade bread was waiting for me to smear butter and jam on it and that it would be just about like heaven.

But that little bit of starter she used was mixed with flour and some other ingredients and it was amazing to me how much bread, rolls and coffee cake it would make! I loved watching the dough rise and getting to help punch it down. Sometimes, I would get to make my own little loaf of bread.

The Kingdom of God is like ... well, like that yeast mixed with flour that grows into 3 big loaves of heavenly bread and gives a bonus of coffee cake and dinner rolls, and a little special loaf made by a 6 year old child, as well!

Jesus has a way of taking familiar things and helping people to see a picture of things that are not as familiar – or not as easy to picture or describe.

He is still talking to the huge crowds of people who have come to hear him. Remember last week, he got into a boat and went out from the shore a little ways so he could speak to them. And he tells them many stories trying to help them understand.

He first began talking about the mustard seed and how it is such a tiny seed but someone planted it in his field and it grew to be a large tree and the birds came and found shade in it.

Now, I confess that I don't know much about a mustard seed, or gardening for that matter, except what I read in the Scriptures and commentaries, but it seems that this parable of Jesus would have been kind of laughable ... humorous to the people.

What I have read about the mustard plant is that no one would intentionally plant it in their field because it would grow into a weed that was a shrub and it would choke out everything else. I wonder if Jesus was using his sense of humor to get a point across. I kind of like that image of him, telling something that was funny, yet still made a point.

And ... what would that point be?

The thing is, even the worst weed – a mustard shrub – grew into shelter and shade for the birds, giving them a place to rest. A blessing for them. An unexpected blessing.

So, the Kingdom of heaven is like a weed? Choking off other plants? A small little seed that grows kind of out of control? That is undesirable to many yet a blessing to the little creatures who are vulnerable and totally dependant on God for protection and care? Hmm ... the kingdom of heaven is like, different!

And then Jesus goes on to tell another example. The Kingdom of heaven is, like, someone who walks through a field that doesn't belong to him and he comes across a hidden treasure! He's so excited about this treasure, he hides it again and then goes off and sells everything he has so he can come back and buy the entire field, just so he can have that treasure.

Or ... in the same way ... a merchant searches for a valuable pearl and when she comes across it, she sells everything else in order to buy that one pearl.

So.... The kingdom of heaven is like things that are hidden ... precious, valuable things and when you find it, you are willing to give up everything else just to have it.

And the last parable, is certainly one that would be and every day sight for many of those in that crowd that day. The kingdom is like fish net thrown into the sea and when it's brought back out it is so full of every kind of fish that the fisherman has to sort through the fish and throw out the ones that are not worth keeping.

And Jesus says, this is how it will be at the end of time. There will be a sorting out. A separating of evil from righteous.

Jesus asked his disciples "Do you understand what I'm saying?"

They answered, "Yes."

I wonder if they really fully understood. Or if they just didn't want to admit that it was kind of hard stuff Jesus was talking about.

First of all, what is the kingdom of heaven anyway? Are we talking about heaven itself? A place where God lives? A place where we go when we die ... that big mansion in the sky?

If that's what we are talking about, then what Jesus is saying sure doesn't match up with some of the images we have heard about in the past, does it? Streets of gold. Pearly Gates, silver lined clouds. The Heavenly Ritz.

I think those are just ways people have tried – as Jesus does – to form some kind of image of a place where there is great glory – in the presence of the Almighty, glorious God.

But we don't know what heaven is really like, anymore than we would be able to describe the kingdom of heaven, which is what Jesus is talking about.

Where is the kingdom of heaven, do you think? Jesus talked about it in other places too. At one time, he said, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." But another time he said, "The kingdom of heaven is here."

With the coming of Jesus, God's kingdom, that is the realm of God's rule, God's will, God's plan for creation came upon us. It is here. It has started already even though it may be hidden from many people ... those who are not looking for it or expecting it.

It may be that it is not even desirable for some of the people. Because some people are wanting something more elaborate, more in line with their worldly, rich taste. Yet, it just might eventually choke out all those things that seem so important in order for the truly important things to become prominent ... blessings and protection, peace and justice for the little vulnerable ones of the world who are so dependant on God.

Yet, seeking the kingdom as a precious treasure or jewel, it is possible to find it and it is so precious that once it is found by those seeking it, they will give up everything to know it is theirs.

The kingdom of heaven is like a tiny little seed that can grow and multiply and become unexpected blessings – shade for birds, loaves to break.

How about a post-modern parable? The kingdom of heaven is, like, an idea comes from a small little group of young teens about somehow forming a baby pantry where moms and dads can come get some help for diapers and formula and other baby items.

And three years later, it has grown to serving over 100 families and continues to grow and to be a blessing to some of God's vulnerable, precious children.

Or one woman has a little idea of serving a meal once a week at no charge for those who might be having some difficulties in life. It seems impossible to do in an aging congregation in Kansas, but it got started and each week about 10 people came and a few people in the church brought food and served.

After a few months it began to seem like it just couldn't continue, but we shared the idea with other churches and within the year, there were 7 different teams from 7 area churches who took turns providing and serving a meal once a week and the crowd that

was served reached at least 80. It finally moved to a place that was larger and would provide more space for more people. All from a tiny seed of an idea!

The kingdom of heaven is like that. It's like something you can barely imagine, yet it grows and becomes a precious thing and provides shalom ... peace, justice, protection, love, righteousness.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be given unto you. Amen.

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