

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

In our Gospel reading Jesus shares several parables with the people, all of them refer to the kingdom of Heaven. I think we can group them under several headings; the kingdom spreads, the kingdom is prized, the kingdom is selective, and the kingdom is shared/displayed.

We pray:

Lord let your kingdom come to us as we hear your word today and may your will be done in us so that we participate in displaying the fine wares of your kingdom to those around us. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

In the last few weeks, we have been hearing parables of the kingdom, and we see that God is the active party in those parables. He spreads seed liberally, that is his Word, all over the place, even in places that are hostile to growth, and he is patiently waiting until the end of the age to remove all evil and sin from his field. Today we have six parables and for the most part we must also see that God is the active party.

The first two parables make the same point, the kingdom is spreading. This is what the picture of the mustard seed shows us. God's kingdom starts off small, but it grows and grows, and as it spreads it offers more and more rest to those who need the shade of its branches.

This is the same picture as the leaven, or yeast. A small amount spread through a large measure of flour causes the dough to rise. God's kingdom is spreading, and it is large! That is how the kingdom is like the pictures that Jesus gives.

The book of Acts bears witness to this at Pentecost, from 11 preachers, preaching the same thing in different languages, 'those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.' Acts 2:41 (ESV) When describing the church in Jerusalem in the following days, 'the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.' Acts 2:47 (ESV) And again in Acts 5:12–15 (ESV) 'Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles... ..the people held them in high esteem. ¹⁴ And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women' And again in Antioch recorded in Acts 11:21 (ESV) 'The hand of the Lord was with them (disciples, preachers), and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.'

This theme just keeps going on and on in the book of Acts. The Word was proclaimed, that is Jesus was proclaimed, and the kingdom grew. It sprouted and flourished. It spread like yeast in dough.

The next parables show us that the kingdom is prized, and selective. You have probably heard a sermon or considered these texts relating to the kingdom of God being of great value and looked at this from a human perspective. The encouragement would have been that we should prize the kingdom. We've got a few hymns today that pick up this point, and it is not a bad point but perhaps there might be a better application of this parable, a more comforting gospel driven application.

I've already mentioned that God is the active party in these parables.

He is the one who sows good seed in the parable of the sower, he is the landowner who spread good seed, that is, believers in the world. He is the mustard seed, well at least his kingdom is, just as the kingdom is like the woman with leaven. But when we get to the parables of the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great price, we suddenly assume that we are the active party. I want you to consider what it means if God is still the active party in these parables?

What is the treasure that God finds in a field, and what is the thing that he sells in order to acquire that field? What is the thing he sacrifices to acquire that treasure?

What is the pearl of great price that God finds and what does he dispose of to obtain that?

In 1929 Harold Lasseter asserted that 30 years prior he had located a substantial gold reef in central Australia. He spent most of those years trying to re-find that reef. He was so committed to his search for this precious metal that he eventually died, while in the area where he thought the gold to be in 1931. He gave up everything, even his life in attempt to find that treasure.

⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. Matthew 13:44–46 (ESV)

The kingdom is the people of God, that is the treasure, that is the pearl; we are the treasure and pearl. We are his very own creation that is so highly valued to him that even though we have devalued ourselves by our disobedience, God still wants us to belong to him and be his prized possession. That is why he gives up everything so that he can claim us as his own.

When I was a youth there was a popular portrayal of this teaching. I remember it distinctly from one camp I attended. It was in a small group bible study. The leader produced a white 20L bucket, if you worked in hospitality or been out the back of a hospitality venue you’ve probably seen them sitting there in stacks. They were once full of mayonnaise or other condiments. The bucket in question was probably used on a farm re-purposed for any number of activities, like cleaning up spilt grain, sometimes they were toolboxes, maybe they were used to clean up animal waste. The bucket in our example had a lid firmly atop but soon the lid was removed, and we could tell by the aroma what was inside. Some might have even considered leaving the room. Then the leader produced a \$50 note and asked us who wanted the money, we all obviously wanted the easy money. But suddenly the money was in the bottom of the bucket, along with the hand of the leader and was being pulled out again. We were being asked are you still interested in the money? We didn’t really know how to answer, it is still \$50 after all but it smells and is covered in

The connection was then made this is what Jesus does for us. He comes down to rescue us, his priceless treasure even though we are covered in ... We are still valuable to him, well at least worth \$50.

This is what the explanation to the second article of the creed also teaches us: he has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil; not with silver or gold, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death, that I may be his own and live under him in his kingdom... Our creeds are not dead old statements that are of little use to our faith except for maintaining orthodoxy, the creeds proclaim to us the gospel of our value to God!

We are the prized possession that God is willing to sacrifice even his own Son to claim. You are the treasure; you are the pearl that God gives up everything to possess. Lest we get an over inflated ego as if we did something special to deserve his great expense; he reminds us in the creed that we were bought because of our sin. He loves us so much, not because we are good people and deserve his love, but because we are his creation and he dearly want us to belong to him, so dearly that he willingly sacrificed his own Son for us!

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us

all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:31–39 (ESV)

Even in the suffering and death of this life. Even in our arguments, conflicts, disagreements, relationship breakdowns, we are Jesus' priceless treasure. We are worth his life. He doesn't want us to dwell and seek out these conflicts, but he certainly does not want them to remove us from Christ's love. He doesn't want his church, his kingdom destroyed by conflict, he doesn't want conflict and suffering to remove any from God's love (which unfortunate it has). Instead he wants his forgiveness to prevail in our hearts, in our lives, in our relationships. He wants faith and trust in Jesus to overcome all our earthly sins and sufferings because with our eyes fixed on him, earthly suffering is incomparable to eternal glory.

Yet the next parable tells us the kingdom is selective. Now we don't want to get the idea here that the net of fish sorted into containers is done on moral grounds. This is not the Christian faith, for we know we are all morally weak, corrupt, that is, we are all sinners. If the behaviour of your fellow parishioner in the past, and especially of the church as a whole over recent years, has not taught you this, I'd be happy in private conversations to point it out to you. Therefore, if morality was the measure, we would all be thrown out, me included. The measure of the fish in the net is righteousness and righteousness is vastly different to morality.

We have a good example of this parable in the Top End of Australia. A few years ago, as an enticement to tourists and locals alike NT tourism started the Million-dollar fish campaign. A barramundi was caught and tagged then released back into NT waters. If you catch that fish, you can claim the million dollars. When angels come and drag up the net of fish at the end of the age they are going to be looking for the tagged fish. Those are the righteous ones, the ones whom God has placed his name upon, the ones who know they are not good yet come to God and receive the righteousness of his Son. The baptised believers, these are the good fish! The ones with the mark of Christ, the faithful ones, the ones who trust the promise! We want to be those fish, for we know we are his priceless treasure, and we are those fish when we continue to trust in Jesus' promises for us. That is the simple faith he requires, to trust his promises and receive his gifts.

In the major parables of this chapter Jesus uses this phrase 'he who has ears let him hear' to indicate that these parables need to be comprehended and believed but also because most people want to ignore them and not believe them. At the end of the parables, he asks the disciples 'do you get it?', because upon hearing and understanding these parables he has a further parable regarding the action of those who have heard and understood.

The parables have taught us that God is spreading his kingdom, that we are the great treasure he seeks, that his Son is the total cost of our purchase, and that he has put his name on us making us righteous. Once we have heard and believed all that, he gives instructions, or a depiction of how we will behave.

I must ask you the same questions Jesus asked his disciples; ⁵¹ “Have you understood all these things?”
Matthew 13:51 (ESV)

Now that we know we are Jesus’ treasure, we claim him also as our treasure and we want to display that fine thing. We want to proclaim his old words or Old Testament and his new words, New Testament. We want to share all the treasures that he has given to us, ourselves, our time and our possessions; but most of all we want to share him because he is our priceless treasure.

Amen

The peace of God the surpasses all our understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus!
Amen.