

O, God...that with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal. ^{1,2}

“Jesus put before the crowds another parable (13:1)”. In truth, Jesus put before the crowds five parables, all having to do with the kingdom of heaven. Heaven - fact or fiction? A state of mind or a destination with a roadmap? Whatever, wherever heaven is, we assume heaven to be different from the world we live in. The secular or temporal world that we spend our earthly lives in may led us to believe that there is no other world. After all, this is the “real” world, the world that we can see, taste and touch. However, our collect reminds us that we are just passing through this place and time; that there is another destination for the people of God.

Jesus, God Incarnate, chose disciples, not merely followers, to inaugurate the kingdom of heaven here on earth. The first two parables tell us how the kingdom of heaven starts. The kingdom starts small, not with a big bang. In healing the boy with epilepsy, Jesus admonishes the disciples who were unable to heal the boy, because they lacked faith:

“ For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there”, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matt 17:20).

¹ YrA_8th_Pentecost_Pr12_26July2020, Genesis 29:15-28; Psalm 105:1-11, 45b; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52.

² The Collect, Proper 12, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 231

Yes, the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds; A farmer would have considered the plant a weed and pulled it from his field. The seeds from trees that grew to maturity were easily scattered by the wind, but too small to be noticed, hidden until transformation occurred through sprouting. Likewise, the Incarnation, the birth of Christ, was a small transforming event, its presence known only to a few, in a hidden, unknown stable in Bethlehem.

“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast...” (v. 33). Yeast, too, is small, and hidden from sight. Please don't think Fleischmann's Yeast! The woman's "yeast", was actually a mixture of a flour and water starter. Think sour dough bread. Did you know, it has been reported that the number one pastime during this pandemic has been making sour dough bread? The process of making the starter is tricky, you have know when it is "ready": use it too soon, and there will be no leavening. Let the mixture go too long, it will spoil, the bread will be ruined and food poisoning can result.

The leavening agent is the vehicle through which transformation occurs. The mustard seed and the leaven are just ordinary things, but with great potential for transformation. Jesus has taught us, over and over, that through ordinary people - the farmer, the Syrophoenician woman at the well, the tax collector, the leper, the blind man Bartimaeus, the widow - extraordinary transformation occurs. These are the seeds of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is God's domain. Ordinary people. Ordinary people like us become vehicles for transformation. None of us has magical powers. However, God has made sure that we have the power

of the Holy Spirit working through us. God asks that we, in our weaknesses, are receptive to what the Holy Spirit suggests, according to the will of God:

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26).

We do not know how to pray as we ought, in the midst of our sins or even in the midst a pandemic. When the kingdom heaven is likened to treasure hidden in a field, what are we to think? The man hid treasure in a field he did not own. He wasn't honest with the owner of the field. And what was he planning to do with the treasure?

The treasures of the kingdom of heaven are meant to be shared and developed, not to be hoarded and secreted (hidden) away. Maybe you have wondered about all the rolls of toilet paper and other goods that have stockpiled. To what end? How about the cans of food in a storage shed that may never be eaten? Consider the merchant: on finding that one pearl of great value, how could the merchant leverage his treasure? His situation is akin to being “house poor”. Easily his asset could be lost or stolen, then what? Too often, in this age of consumerism, we humans search for that one thing that will make us better, smarter, richer, sexier, whatever. Sadly, when we have acquired “that object”, we often feel empty, deflated, unhappy. We forget that the temporal nature of this world and the items in it, have no lasting transformative power.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind (v. 47) ”. A large haul is a good thing, isn't it? But not everything caught is edible or desirable. The kingdom of heaven is not a catch-all. There will come a time of

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separation, the weeds will be separated from the wheat; the wheat will be separated from the chaff. The angels will carry out God's will: separating the evil from the righteous.

Jesus proclaimed "*The kingdom of heaven has come near*" (Matt 10:7). The kingdom of heaven *has* come near. We need look no further than ourselves. We received the seeds of transformation through our baptism into the body of Christ. As members of the body of Christ and heirs to the kingdom of heaven, we draw on the "treasure that is old and new", the Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus.

Disciples are not easily made. "*Have you understood all this?*", Jesus asked his disciples. They said yes. If he asks me, I'll say maybe. And since I can speak only for myself, I understand that a seed has been planted, that is it still being transformed. What I know for sure is that it is not the secular, temporal world from which I draw strength, renewal, purpose and life; it is from the love God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, including this pandemic, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:39) Amen.