

Call to Worship

God says: Come see, the Kingdom, I am building.
O God, give us eyes to see what you are doing.

God says: Come see, the Kingdom, I am building.
O God, help train our eyes to see.

God says: Come see, the Kingdom, I am building.
O God, our sight is poor and we see only what we want to see.

God says: Come, I will then tell you stories of my Kingdom. These will help you see.
Come, I will tell you stories of my Kingdom. Come be part of the story.
Come, I will tell you stories of my Kingdom. Come see and hear and understand.

Prayer of Approach

Through dreams and visions, O God, through stories and parables,
you broaden the horizon and hope of your people,
that all may rediscover the meaning of your covenant,
even in the midst of trial, exile and isolation.
Holy Spirit, come tell Your story,
that you may increase in us that we may better live and share your word;
so that all people may joyfully respond to your call
and share in your promises for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

O God, Creator and giver of life,
You asked for my hands that you may use them; I gave them freely and joyfully.
I give them for a time but I find I often reach for what I want.
Your work is hard O God, and what I want suits my plans.

You asked for my feet, to carry Good News; I gave them freely and joyfully.
I gave them for a mile, yet Your way is hard and so I often choose my own way.

You asked for my words to speak against injustice and oppression; I gave them freely and joyfully. Yet I gave a whisper because the words of truth are difficult to speak.

You asked for my eyes so I would not turn from poverty and hurt; I gave them freely and joyfully. I see it, but my privilege takes my sight to more beautiful things.

You asked for my heart so that I may love what you love; I gave it freely and joyfully.
I love what you love, Lord, especially when it suits me and my own understanding.

Lord help me to be renewed and forgive my weak efforts to serve you.
Lord renew a right spirit in me, so that I may follow you call me beyond comfort and convenience.

Lord we need your strength to keep us focussed on your story and kingdom.
Restore to us a sense of what is most precious, that is your love for us.
Give us joy as we abandon lesser things for the pursuit of your love told through the gospel of Christ.

In Jesus name, Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

To all who turn from sin in sorrow,
to all who turn to God in hope,
This is God's word of Grace:
We are accepted, we are forgiven, we are loved.
This gift we have from God.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

Hymn #761: Who's Going to Tell the Story?

1. Who's goin' to tell the story? You and I!
Tell of the Lord's great glory? You and I!
Who's goin' to let the whole world know?
Help his disciples grow and multiply? You and I!

Scripture Reading

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

He put before them 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.

Message

In this series of 5 parables there are several themes or VALUES that overlap and make them a coherent collection of stories that together give us clues to the nature of God's kingdom.

As a reminder, a parable is a story on a curve. It helps us to see something that we cannot always see directly. While we cannot see God's kingdom directly, Jesus helps us imagine the kingdom by plotting these kingdom values into a picture. Jesus does this much in the same way a mathematician will plot mathematical values on a graph ... forming the mathematical values into a picture.

So what are these kingdom values, Jesus gives us that plot us a picture which in turn will help us see what we cannot see directly with our human sight?

Well the first two parables, the one about the mustard seed and the one about the yeast, together point us to a common kingdom principle ... I will give this kingdom value the name 'surprise'. In the mustard seed and yeast you only have something very small. A mustard seed is tiny and so is a granule of yeast. They are tiny.

But when they are given a chance to do their thing, they surprise us ...

- the mustard seed growing into an incredibly robust shrub

- the yeast giving dough a new identity as bread.

The mustard seed is so surprising says Jesus that the shrub becomes a tree suitable for birds to nest. How surprising indeed!

And how can the tiny yeast make three measures of flour rise? Of course there is a scientific explanation to do with the respiratory cycle of the yeast and alcohol ... but every time I have made bread ... it works ... and I am always a little surprised ... even though it is predictable. And I know right away if I forget the yeast ... I don't get bread ... I just get solid rock hard dough ...

So whether the mustard seed surprises us irregularly with how it grows ... and the yeast surprises us regularly with its consistent work ... Jesus is saying never lose your sense of surprise when the Kingdom of God bursts forth ... seen ... into the weary kingdom of earth.

Thy kingdom come.

The next two parables, while they still have elements of surprise ... there is a hidden treasure discovered accidentally and a pearl of great worth found after a search. The treasure in the field is a totally unexpected surprise ... the pearl at the end of the search ... isn't totally unexpected ... but if you have ever spent any time searching for something ... finally having found it ... you know there is still an element of surprise.

While there is still here an element of surprise ... these parables are more about the value of what is found ... more than just surprise ... these two parables tell us that the Kingdom of Heaven is a great ... prize.

The parable of the treasure in the field tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven is free treasure. It is given to all who find precious grace.

But the parable also tells us that the treasure must be guarded and also owned. The parable says that the one who finds the treasure must take ownership of the place where the can be found.

This is where I cannot see clearly if the field where the treasure is the church or if the field represents the person's life. Perhaps it is both?

For isn't it true that some lose faith when they feel they have no share in the proprietorship of the church? I feel I have baptized the children of many who consider that the church itself belongs to a previous generation. Who else have been excluded from taking ownership of the church?

But certainly this is related to owning one's own faith. Yes, faith is the treasure that is given freely, but doesn't it also cost us our lives too? We have to own our own faith it cannot belong to our parents or grandparents or our friends or our pastors or elders. The faith that you treasure is a gift to you.

Where the parable of the treasure in the field speaks of a prize that is more or less easily found, the parable of the pearl is about the refined faith that comes as a prize with ... dare I say it ... discipline.

How does the pearl merchant know she has found the most perfect pearl? She has seen and appraised the lesser pearls that she has owned. This parable isn't about judging other peoples' pearls ... oh no. This is about your own prize, your own faith, your own discipleship.

You have been given a treasure ... a prize ... a pearl ... but is it of such great value to you that you will sell everything to take hold of it.

The final parable stands alone. If the first two parables tell us about 'surprise' and the next two about the value of the 'prize' ... then the 5th stand alone parable ... is the ... (sorry about this) ... the reprise.

It is a reprise because reprise can mean ... repeating a performance. And here Jesus is repeating the parables but with a great crescendo.

He adds here an eschatological or apocalyptic element to the pictures he is rendering of the kingdom.

Sometimes a reprise gives a finishing emphasis to what has been already offered. And this parable of the nets and fish and the sorting is just that giving emphasis to what has already been offered.

In this parable Jesus is saying, the other parables aren't meant to be cute. They are not for fun nor are they to be taken lightly. They are serious and not pretend stories.

The word reprise can also mean a renewal or resumption of something that has been put down or an action that has been ceased.

Have we come to expect faith ... to be predictable?

Maybe it is again time to be open to being surprised by God?

Have we come to think of faith ... as something economical? As something affordable? As something discounted?

Is it time again to remember at what cost our redemption was purchased?

Jesus in his reprise parable leaves us feeling uneasy ... and I think he means to. The other parables tell us the high value of the Kingdom of Heaven and this one tells us its importance.

Surprise, prize and reprise ... together these have given us insights to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Finally Jesus asks his disciples, including us ...

"Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes."

We know that if we read the rest of the gospel ... we see that they both understand and do not understand. They remember and forget.

Aren't we the same way?

Sometimes we remember the surprises of grace ... the treasured value of faith ... and the serious reprise of the gospel imperatives.

And therefore the one thing we always must remember is that The Kingdom of Heaven is not gained by being perfect ... but remembering the gospel's perfection ...

The perfect story has a perfect ending because the storyteller is perfect and we are simply the characters in the story of grace.

Hmmm ... whenever I remember that familiar grace ... I find myself ... still surprised at the great treasure I have found. **Amen.**

Hymn 774: Freely, Freely/God Forgave my Sin

He said: 'Freely, freely you have received; freely, freely give.
Go in my name and because you believe,
others will know that I live.'

Offertory Prayer

O God, you have shown us that which has true worth: faith, love, devotion and neighbour. We ask therefore that these offerings would be a token of all that we would give up for the sake of your kingdom. Receive these gifts, our offerings, as we give ourselves fully to your service. For the sake of your kingdom which is coming. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Almighty God,

Our hearts are full O God, and we are thankful. For we have been given, we return thanks to you, O Provider of all.

In the presence of your bounty keep us humble,
In the presence of the all people's needs make us compassionate and caring.

Give us faith in our praying and love in our serving, knowing that by your power
all may find a rest from adversity and grace to treasure our successes.

We pray for all life, the earth and everything in it. We pray for health and prosperity, equality and freedom, surprise and joy in all of life.

We pray for those who are bitter and those who are sad; we pray for those who are angry and those who feel helpless. We pray for those who are too quick to criticize and those who are too quick to take offence. We pray for those whose only desire is to have their own way and for those who need strength to take hold of the beauty you have placed in each one of us.

We pray for those for whom faith no longer contains surprise or any prize. We pray that the treasures of heaven would be found in our hearts once again.

We pray for those who are lonely and afraid. Bring the company of saints to those who have difficulty making friends. O God, bring your abiding presence to those who have difficulty trusting. May you inspire humble confidence and companionship.

We pray for those who are ill. Bring healing and wholeness.
We pray for the dying, bring your peace and consolation. May all hear the words well done good and faithful servant.

We pray for our country and for our leaders. Give them wisdom, accountability and charity so that they may lead with integrity and compassion.

We pray for all those who are weary of fighting Covid19, please give us all endurance and renewed purpose.

We also pray silently now, naming those beloved of us, or situations needing your intercession, O God ... hear our prayers ...

Redeeming Sustainer,
visit your people
and pour out your strength and courage upon us,
that we may hurry to make you welcome
not only in our concern for others,
but by serving them
generously and faithfully in your name. Amen.

Blessing:

““The Lord bless you
and keep you;

the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.”

Amen