

## “The Kingdom of Heaven”

Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52

Have you ever tried to have a conversation with someone and somehow your meaning gets lost in the translation? In these types of conversations, we keep trying to help the other people understand what we are saying so we keep throwing out different phrases, different words, just hoping that something will make a connection and there will be understanding about what we are saying. That is exactly the same thing that Jesus does with the parables in the Gospels. Literally, the word parable means “to hurl along side”. Jesus used the parables stories to encourage people of faith to think about the Kingdom of God in a new way. Parables hurl us into a new reality, where we are placed side by side with the thinking of the Kingdom of God and the thinking of this world. We know that the thinking of this world believes that might is right. We know that the thinking of this world believes that the most powerful will be the last one standing in the end. We know that the thinking of this world believes that sacred lessons concerning big important theological ideals cannot be found in ordinary everyday things.

Jesus comes along and changes all that. He hurls us into the Kingdom of God with images of mustard seeds, seeds that grow to be big trees, seeds that no one really values because in reality, the mustard plant is more like a weed, invasive and will eventually take over everything. Jesus challenges us to think about how the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.

Through the parables of Jesus, we are hurled into a new reality where we experience a woman making bread. Nothing usually about that except that she uses yeast, and not like the pretty packets of yeast that our grocery stores sell today. This woman takes some yeast, a small amount of a substance that makes bread rise, and mixes this insignificant yeast with flour, and not just a little bit of flour, enough flour to make 150 loaves, enough flour to make bread for people for weeks to come, enough flour that will make an amount of bread that in fact it won't be eaten before it goes bad. Jesus challenges us to think about how the Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast.

Through the parables, we are hurled into a new reality where we encounter a fisherman's net, filled with both good and bad fish, and when it is brought to shore, the fisherman will separate the fish. We are hurled into a new reality where we encounter a field purchased at great price because of the treasure hidden among the dirt. We are hurled into a new reality where we find a pearl of great price and

discover what the merchant will do to own such a pearl. Through these ordinary images, Jesus challenges us as people of faith to think about the Kingdom of Heaven and what it is like for us to experience God's Kingdom here on earth.

In each of these parable, there are Different words, Different phrases, Different images, all used in the hopes that just one would make a connection and there would be understanding. All used in the hopes that we as people of faith will truly understand the miracle of the Kingdom of Heaven that is in our midst. All used in the hopes that we as children of God will finally know what the Kingdom of Heaven is like.

That's the situation that Jesus finds himself in our Scripture today. He has been preaching to a crowd gathered and to his disciples and he is telling them about the Kingdom of Heaven. He has used images like a sower sowing seeds, throwing them on different types of soil. He has used images like weeds among the wheat and what the Kingdom of God will look like in the end. He is speaking in parables to the crowd and his disciples.

And he is realizing that they just not are getting it. His words are getting lost in the translation. His meaning is just not taking root. Even after he explains the parables, he can tell that the light bulbs are just not coming on with these images of a Sower and weeds among the wheat.

Jesus realizes that he has a language barrier between him and the crowd and his disciples. So he starts throwing out all these different images...The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed...The Kingdom of God is like leaven in the bread...The Kingdom of God is like finding a great treasure in a field and then selling everything you own to purchase that field...The Kingdom of God is like a pearl merchant who spends his whole life searching for that one great perfect pearl and when he finds it, sells everything he owns just so that he can own it...The Kingdom of God is like a net thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind and then when it is full, the fish are separated into the good and the bad...

And Jesus asks the crowd: Do you understand now? And Jesus asks the disciples: Do you understand now?

And Jesus gets a resounding yes! From everyone All the while they are shaking their head, No. There is a language barrier here between Jesus and the crowds. There is a language barrier between Jesus and his disciples. So Jesus pulls his disciples aside and simply says, be like the scribes...Keep learning...Study the old and the new...Never stop trying to understand the Kingdom of God.

There is a real language barrier in our Scripture today. Words get lost in the translation. The meaning is just not taking root for one simple reason: How do we describe the Kingdom of God to a group of people who have never opened

themselves up to be transformed by God's peace and justice. How do we describe the Kingdom of God when our very basic language just cannot capture its essence? How do we describe the Kingdom of Heaven and the experience of God's saving love and God's amazing grace?

How would we describe the Kingdom of God to people who have never experienced anything like God's Kingdom, who only understand and believe the thinking of this world, who don't trust that God is in control, who don't understand that there is something more precious than all the money and power that this world has to offer? What would we say? What words would we use?

There is a real language barrier there. And this language barrier was not just taking place during Jesus' time. It is happening right now. We have been given the call to go out and share the Gospel message to all of God's children. We have been given the call to out and tell about the Kingdom of God.

How would we describe the Kingdom of God? What words and phrases would we use? What would we do if our meaning got lost in the translation? How would we describe the Kingdom of God?

We know what it felt like when the Kingdom of God took root in our hearts and took claim in our lives, but how would we describe that feeling? The Kingdom

of Heaven is like... maybe it is like finding a really good pair of shoes on sale. You know any fancy designer, they must have shoes of the year and finding them for only pennies... maybe it is like the Chicago Cubs actually winning a World Series... maybe it is like finding your grandmother's ring after you had lost it for several months...

How would we describe what the Kingdom of God is like?

We know what it feels like to come up out of those baptismal waters and to be renewed and refreshed by God's grace and God's love, but how would we describe that feeling? The Kingdom of Heaven is like... maybe a nice cold Coke after we have been working in the yard all day in the hot sun... maybe it is like jumping off the high dive into the cool blue water on a hot July day... maybe it is like a thank you or a hug from someone that we didn't think even know the meaning of the word: Kind.

How would we describe the Kingdom of God?

We all know what it is like to experience God's grace in our lives and effect that it has had on us as people of faith, but how would we describe that feeling? The Kingdom of God is like... a mustard seed, is like leaven, is like finding a great treasure and selling everything you own to purchase that treasure, is like a

merchant who is seeking for that one perfect pearl and when he finds it, he sells everything he owns just so that he could own that great pearl.

The Kingdom of God is like...I'll let you feel in the rest of that statement.

How would we describe something that we have never seen but we have all experienced in our lives? How would we describe something that we are not sure what exactly it looks like but we know deep in our hearts that it exists? How would we describe something that is working the present now but it is still promised yet to come?

What words and phrases would we use? How would we overcome the language barrier?

The Kingdom of God is like...I'll let you fill in the rest of the statement.

May we never stop trying to understand the Kingdom of God. Amen.