



## “Kingdom Pictures”

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost  
Saturday & Sunday July 29 and 30, 2017

All Services

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Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

My husband and I are very happy to be here with you today. We were here two years ago and it is really a joy to be back and receive such a warm welcome from all of you.

So as we know, Jesus often talked in parables, little stories or comparisons, simple pictures from everyday life that help us understand more difficult to understand spiritual realities. In this message Jesus is talking about the kingdom of heaven. So what is the kingdom of heaven? I think some of us think about the end of ages when Jesus returns, that's the kingdom of heaven. But I don't think that's what Jesus is talking about here. The kingdom of heaven is within us, in the here and now. As Jesus said when he preached "The kingdom of heaven is within you" and in the Lord's Prayer, he taught us to pray "your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." So according to this prayer, the kingdom of heaven is whenever and wherever God's will is done here on earth as in heaven.

But what is the kingdom of heaven really like? In these kingdom pictures that Jesus describes in the parables we just read, he compares the kingdom to a mustard seed, yeast in a loaf of bread, a treasurer, a pearl of great price, and a big catch of fish. If we look at these pictures closely we see that the kingdom of heaven is alive and growing. The kingdom of heaven is a treasure so valuable that it is worth everything we have and are. And the kingdom of heaven is open to everyone.

Who is the kingdom of heaven like a mustard seed? Probably most of you have seen a mustard seed, it's little, teeny tiny and round. If you buy that fancy mustard, you'll see the seeds in it. Yet when planted this tiny seed can grow into a tree, in the similar way even one small deed of kindness, an act of mercy, or justice can have a ripple effect and grow into something much bigger.

I recently met a young man named Josephat. Sadly Josephat is HIV positive. He came to the Lutheran hospital in Mwanza, Northern Tanzania near where we live, and at that time he was ready to end his life. Thankfully he met some people there who encouraged him, who told him look you can take care of these. We can help make sure that we get them, these will enable you to live a normal life, and more importantly they gave him hope through Jesus Christ. Now Josephat is a counselor for other young people who are HIV positive. Someone shared the gospel with him and now he is sharing it with others.

Jesus also says “the kingdom of heaven is like a small amount of yeast that someone puts into the bread dough when they’re making bread so that it doesn’t just stay a flat hard lump, but it leavens, it becomes light. Yeast is a tiny organism that produces carbon dioxide as it grows as it comes into contact with moisture and warmth. So, it makes the bread light and palatable. In the same way, the smallest amount of love and encouragement and caring for others can change an entire community to be more like the kingdom of heaven.

I think the church is like this, one little tiny speck of yeast can’t raise the whole bread dough, can’t make a whole loaf nice and fluffy, but all of the yeast working together make the bread something wonderful and delicious. So, it takes a lot of people working together to accomplish something good, to proclaim the good news, to do justice, to build God’s kingdom here on earth.

The kingdom of heaven is also like a treasure hidden in the field, or a pearl of great price. In both cases the person who finds the treasure sells everything he or she has in exchange for it. Similarly, the kingdom of heaven requires our wholehearted commitment, everything we have. But the price is worth it.

In Tanzania, we sometimes have people converting from Islam to the Christian faith and recently I was privileged to be part of a baptism of a young woman who is doing just that. Raised in a Muslim home she was coming to accept Christ and Christianity. Well sometimes this means that people will no longer be in contact with their family. In some places, it could even be dangerous for their lives, so she was willing to give all of her old life, her relationship with her family and friends in order to gain this great treasure of belonging to Christ and being a part of God’s kingdom.

Then Jesus tells about a fisherman casting a net. All kinds of fish are drawn into that net, just like all kinds of peoples are invited into the kingdom of God, old, young, fat, skinny. Some fish are blue or silver, or red or green, all kinds of fish come into the net, all kinds of people invited into God’s kingdom. It reminds me of watching fisherman down on the peninsula in southern Tanzania. This is part of the Companion Synod Relationship, I think you have a companion congregation in Lutherans, in that part of Tanzania, in the Conde’ Diocese, are a part of the Lower Susquehanna relationship. I hope some of you might get to go visit there some day. But even if you don’t, just imagine with me the beautiful, beautiful beach on this lake. The fisherman go out a night, you can see their lights from afar. In the morning they come in, they open up their nets and there they have their fish. But some fish are good to eat and some are not, so just like in the parable, the ones that aren’t get thrown into the lake, and the ones that are good to eat they keep.

There’s an especially tasty kind called the Comprango that’s really just a great big old catfish. It’s very delicious and they kept it to make massa. Fish were an important part of the diet in Jesus’ day, just like the people who live on Lake Nyasa, or Lake Victoria or near the Indian Ocean. Fish are an important part of protein, even today for those people. But you can’t afford to eat goat meat or can’t afford to buy a sheep, or you most certainly can’t afford to eat beef, you can go and catch a fish, and that will provide protein for your family for the day so the children can grow and be healthy.

So, if we are good fish we will help bring spiritual nourishment to those who are hungering for the word of God or the love of Jesus Christ. On the other hand if we are not part of God's kingdom, and we are not willing to help the kingdom grow, someday we may realize we've wasted our time here on earth. And even though we may be sorry, it may be too late to reclaim that time when we could have been a part of God's kingdom and a part of his work on earth.

So, the kingdom of heaven is active and growing, like a mustard seed that grows into a tree, or yeast that leavens the loaf. The kingdom of God is precious enough for us to give all we have to be a part of it. The kingdom of God includes everyone, all kinds of people, and the good news is we are invited to be mustard seeds and yeast. We are invited to be the treasurer hunter who gives everything for the treasurer or the pearl of great price. We're all invited to be good fish who can help god's kingdom grow.

I am going to close with a little song that I learned last week at the summary missionary conference. We got together with a lot of our other fellow missionaries and some of our colleagues from the Chicago office and it goes like this:

The work of God, the work of God, the work of God it is not done.  
The work of God, the work of God, O may your kingdom come.  
These are the hands, these are the hands, these are hands of Jesus,  
These are the hands, these are the hands, these are the hands of Jesus.  
The work of God, the work of God, the work of God it is not done.  
The work of God, the work of God, O may your kingdom come.

And I'll just close with this last thought that we hear in the theme of the ELCA, God's work, our hands, your hands may help to bring the kingdom to be here on earth.

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