**July 26, 2020 Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

***The Final Word***

**Scripture:** Matthew 13:31-52 NRSV

*(31)He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; (32)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." (33)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." …*

*(44)"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. (45)"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; (46)on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. (47)"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; (48)when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. (49)So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous (50)and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (51)"Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." (52)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."*

**Notes:**

1. These parables are more like ***comparisons***.
   1. The parable of the ***net*** has the same meaning as the parable of the weeds and wheat.
   2. When the Lord returns, He will ***judge*** all of mankind.
2. Jesus compared the Kingdom of heaven to something as ***ordinary*** as a mustard seed,
   1. He compares the kingdom of Heaven to things we would not ***think*** about.
   2. God does not ***see*** things as we ***see*** them.
3. The Kingdom is like ***yeast*** that a woman mixed with flour.
   1. Jesus mentions ***yeast*** in a positive way.
   2. Jesus says ***leavened*** bread is like the Kingdom of heaven.
   3. The parable of the yeast is about something that makes the end product ***grow*** exponentially and become an amazingly ***abundant*** gift.
4. The Kingdom of heaven is a thing of such ***great*** ***value***.
   1. The landowner and the merchant give up everything to gain the thing they ***want*** ***most***.
   2. What is of the greatest ***value*** in this world?
5. Are we ***willing*** to give up all, for the Kingdom of heaven?
   1. Are you ***willing*** to take up your cross and follow Jesus?
   2. Jesus is like the merchant; you are the ***pearl***.
   3. Put aside your foolish ways and ***follow*** him.
   4. ***Look*** to him for the things you need in your life.
   5. Give Jesus your undivided ***attention***.
   6. What would you ***surrender*** to be a part of God’s kingdom?

**Script:**

Have you ever made homemade bread? I remember being at my grandmother’s when she would make bread. The smells would make your mouth water and aroma’s would make you hunger, building the desire for just a taste. When grandma Mock would make bread you could always count on fresh made cinnamon rolls as well and that was what I truly desired. In fact, when I went off to college each year she would make me a pan of cinnamon rolls for my birthday. I believe Ted has the recipe she would use and on occasion he makes bread and vegetable soup the way she did. I never paid attention to the recipe but in some ways wish that I had.

We all have eaten and enjoyed fresh made bread. We probably enjoy it more when we make it our self. Or it brings back floods of memories like it does for me. But what does it consist of: A few cups of white Flour, 6 cups; A little bit of white sugar, 2/3 cup; A little bit of salt, 1 ½ tsp; Vegetable Oil, ¼; And some water , 2 cup warm. But there is one thing missing in this recipe, does anyone know what it might be the yeast; 1 ½ Tbsp of active dry yeast. Bread doesn’t get light and fluffy without yeast.

Today we are looking at more of the parables that Jesus shared in Matthew 13, four of them to be exact. But one of them is only one brief statement and it talks about yeast and bread, and if you blink you will miss it. I do not know how many times I read over it and never realize its significance. Turn with me to Matthew 13:31-33 and 44-52 as we share our sermon passage today.

*(31)He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; (32)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." (33)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." …*

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“He put another parable before them…” Jesus had just finished the parable of the weeds and wheat that we spoke of last week. And it seems as if immediately begins another, and then another , and another and another, and yet another. They aren’t long drawn out stories, really These parables are more like comparisons: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed…”; “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.”; “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls…”; “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind”. Five parables in rapid succession, six if you count the parable we spoke of last week. But what is the point Jesus is drawing us to, what does he want us to realize, and what does he want us to learn from these short pithy stories? And what does he want us to do in response to them? Lets look at them.

First, I want to talk about the parable of the net. This parable has very much the same meaning as the parable of the weeds and wheat. One day when the Lord returns, He will begin to judge all of mankind, past and present. He will take all of those who are good to be with him, where he will keep them. However, those who are not good, will be sent to the abyss and thrown into the fiery pit, where it is described with extreme heat, with misery, noted by the weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. It sounds like a most despicable place.

Next we backtrack to the mustard seed. Mustard is, indeed a small seed.  But the smallest?  Not really. Jesus says “when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches.”  Not only is that an exaggeration, it borders on fabrication. While mustard does grow into shrubs, ones that can get to be six or more feet tall, it would be a very small, light bird that would be able to nest in a mustard shrub, because the stems are not sturdy enough to support that kind of weight.  This parable is Jesus at His best.  The point is not whether or not a bird could nest in a mustard bush, or even whether mustard becomes a bush or a tree, but rather the amazing fact that Jesus compared the Kingdom of heaven to something as ordinary as a mustard seed or shrub at all.

Some scholars have said Jesus is making fun of the comparisons made in ancient times, comparisons between mighty trees and powerful kingdoms, like that of the Babylonians.  In the Book of Daniel, the prophet compares Babylon to a mighty tree:

*The tree grew, and was strong, and its height reached to the sky, and its sight to the end of all the earth. The leaves of it were beautiful, and its fruit much, and in it was food for all: the animals of the field had shadow under it, and the birds of the sky lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it” (Daniel 4:10-12)*

Teacher and theologian, Will Willimon states regarding the satirical comparison between Babylon and Heaven,

*So great a tree is impressive.  Great, powerful kingdoms like Babylon, or the British Empire, or the United States, are impressive.  By comparison Jesus presents a mustard bush, a mere shrub.  The Kingdom of God is like a shrub?  If there is impressiveness in God’s Kingdom, it is sure not the impressiveness that we expect (36 Pulpit Resources No 3, Year A, July, August, September 2008, p. 18)*

Jesus never said things the way his listeners, or we, would have expected. He tends to compare the kingdom of Heaven to things we would not think about. Things that would make us scratch our head and say, “I never would have thought of it that way?” Here Jesus is telling us that the kingdom we are searching for is not what we are expecting. Perhaps Jesus was reminding everyone that God does not see things as we see them.  The great nations may look like magnificent trees to us, but are no more significant than blades of grass to God.  The Kingdom may look like a mustard seed to us, but what wonders God can do with a simple seed – given the right conditions.  Which brings us the parable of the yeast...

Jesus said that the Kingdom is like yeast that a woman mixed in with 3 measures of flour.  There are two interesting features here.  First, Jesus mentions yeast in a positive way.  Yeast is a leavening agent.  Leaven is produced by something that has become rotten or rancid.  Therefore, to Jews of Jesus’ day, leaven was the rotten part, the part not to be touched.  Leaven was always used to compare a thing with something that was corrupt.  So, when Jesus mentions the woman putting yeast in her bread, that would’ve been thought to have spoiled the bread.

But Jesus says leavened bread is like the Kingdom of heaven.  It makes a little more sense when we realize that the 3 measures would have been about 10 gallons of flour.  When the woman added the yeast and let the dough rise, she would’ve created enough bread to feed some 150-200 people; right around 53 loaves according to the recipe that I looked up.

So, like the parable of the mustard seed, this parable is about an unexpected, almost upside-down description of the Kingdom, not as something that spoils the end product (as we might have expected), but something that makes the end product grow exponentially and become an amazingly abundant gift.

But what about those next two parables, the parable of the treasure in the field and the parable of the pearl of great value? These two can be taken together. Their common trait is this … when the person discovers the valuable thing (the hidden treasure in one parable, the pearl in the other), the person sells all he has and uses the proceeds to obtain this thing of great value.  So the Kingdom of heaven is a thing of such great value that anyone who glimpses it should give up everything he or she has, in order to be able to obtain what is there for the taking, God’s kingdom.

Think your favorite sport; think about those who have risen to attain the highest honors in them. How much did the athletes in these sports have to give to be win their championships? No they did not pay off the officials to attain their championships. They had to make sacrifices and give up many luxuries in order to devote themselves to being the best that they can be.

I do not want to sound foolish comparing the kingdom of heaven to winning the super bowl. but in essence, that’s what Jesus has done.

Tom Brady has done much from diet to exercise to be the best that he can be. The same can be said for other athletes who are or have been the best in their field, People like Vanessa Williams, Troy Polamalu; David Castro, and in my eyes greats like Roberto Clemente, and Willie Mays. The same is true for any champion, and isn’t that exactly what the landowner and the merchant do in Jesus’ parables?  They give up everything they have to gain the one thing they want the most.

That is what Jesus asks of us through these parables, to see what is of the greatest value in this world and then to give up everything to attain it.  He wants us to see the ultimate value of the Kingdom of heaven and wants us to be willing to give up everything to get that one thing of great value.

Are we?  Are we willing to give up everything to gain the Kingdom of heaven?  In all of the synoptic Gospels, Jesus says that we should be ready to take up our cross and follow Him In Matthew 10:35; In Mark 8:34; In Luke 9:23, so, He must have seriously meant this challenge for us.

Are you willing to take up your cross and follow Jesus? Are you willing to do what is necessary to reach the goal. Have you ever wanted something so badly, that you would give up ***anything*** for it? That you would give up ***everything*** for it? That’s how bad Jesus wants us to want the Kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is like the merchant in the parable. But what, or should I say who is the pearl of great value. You are the pearl, and he gave everything so that you would be able to come to him in a right relationship. He wants you to put aside your foolish ways and follow him. He wants you to stop chasing after wealth, and be content in the things that he supplies. He wants you to stop chasing after fame, and know that he knows your name and that is all the fame you need. He wants you to stop looking at the pleasures of this world to fulfill the desire that fills the emptiness in your soul; an emptiness that is only fulfilled by a right relationship with Jesus. Start looking to him to find the things you think you need in your life; he has already supplied your needs.

So … maybe, if we ***really*** want the Kingdom of heaven bad enough. We lay down our worldly desires at the feet of Jesus. We let loose of the things of this world we hold on to so tightly and give them to Jesus; we turn away from the activities that distract us from Jesus; and give Jesus our undivided attention.

How badly do we want what Jesus has to offer? He offers us the kingdom of heaven; a kingdom that cannot be explained in earthly terms; a kingdom in which we cannot even imagine; because it is so much more than one has ever dreamed. What would you give to just be able to get a small piece of this priceless gem? What would you surrender in order to be a part of this kingdom?

When we want it bad enough to give up whatever we have to get it, then whatever we have of value we will give to God, we will make the sacrifice of the earthly for the heavenly to the one who owns the Kingdom. And what we have given to God may be folded into all of the other things given to God by others because they too want the Kingdom.  When God folds all of our valuable gifts, our sacrifices, together, the leaven in them will begin to work and these little, small gifts that we sacrificed will grow like the tiny mustard seed grows it will grow until what we have given ***becomes*** the Kingdom of heaven, that most valuable of things to obtain.