

Some Parables from Matthew 13

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.

'Have you understood all this? [the parables]' 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.'⁵³ When Jesus had finished these parables, he left that place.

Reflection

Jesus often spoke in parables when describing the kingdom of God – what the world can/will be like when we live in God's way. The long parables like the story of the Prodigal Son, or the parable of the sower, are often given great attention and the short ones only a few sentences long are often quickly glossed over, such as the ones found in chapter 13 of Matthew's Gospel (see above). Here the kingdom of God is likened to a mustard seed, the tiniest of seeds that can grow into a large tree enjoyed by all. Or to yeast, which when mixed with flour makes the dough expand or to discovering hidden treasure or a pearl of great price that is worth giving all we have for.

What do these parables have in common? Any ideas? They all involve people doing something, a man planting the mustard seed, a woman mixing the dough, the merchant selling everything to secure the newly discovered treasure or pearl of great price. Perhaps they illustrate that we all have our part to play in God's Kingdom. God's kingdom cannot happen without people. It is something we can all discover but may mean different things to different people.

Are there any contrasting images in the parables? Mustard seed and yeast are plain, everyday items, small but vital. And the newly discovered treasure and pearl of great price are precious items that can only be dreamt of by most people. What does this say about the ordinariness and extraordinariness of the Kingdom of God?

These contrasting images are also of growth and immediacy. The seed and yeast grow unseen in the dark and the treasure and pearl are revealed immediately. What is it about the kingdom that grows unseen or suddenly reveals itself?

The final verses illustrate a teaching that is often missed (they are not familiar to me). It is the importance of both the old and new. In terms of Matthew's understanding it is both the importance of the old scriptures and the new teaching of Jesus in both words and deeds. It is how Matthew saw the old and new as not competing visions but complementary visions of the kingdom of God.

The pandemic has shown us new ways of being church and being society by necessity. The old and new ways do not have to be competing visions but complementary visions.

The next few weeks/months will be a challenging time for Pembrokeshire. The crowds are here again, bringing back the buzz of the place with many enjoying the hospitality offered by businesses that have suffered recently and are working hard to offer their services safely.

In the joy of summer holidays, it is important not to lose sight of other people's needs. Many

who have been shielding and have spent little time outside are wary of coming out. If all goes well, from the 16th August they can begin to enjoy the locality again because the presence of the virus in the community is very low (10 or cases so per million people).

However, to keep the virus under control, we must all play our part: keeping our social distance and regularly washing our hands are still vital to keep visitors and residents, business owners and workers safe, so we can all enjoy what our community has to offer.

We are eager to reopen the church buildings, but we will need to be patient until the Elders have worked out ways to open safely under oversight from Synod. It will be a mixture of old and new ways of being church.

Loving God, help us be mindful of others when we are out and about, of those taking their first steps outside, of those businesses and services struggling to get back on their feet and of those able to enjoy Pembrokeshire once again. Help us remember that we need each other and to play our part in your kingdom as we seek to discover your will for the church and our buildings in the new way of being normal.

John Hayton

Hwyl am y tro
Bye for now

Prayer by Susan Durber (Surprised by grace)

I give thanks
For all the treasure in my life.
For the love received
Showing me that I am lovable
And that love is real.

I give thanks
For the people who have taught me
What it means to be human
And whose wisdom I hold on to.

I give thanks
For the books I have read
The films I have seen
The art I have gazed at
And the music I have listened to
For all the witnesses to truth and delight
Who accompany my life and bless it with meaning.

I give thanks
For the early church
The saints and reformers
For martyrs, scholars and poets
For hymn writers and preachers
For servants of the poor and proclaimers of justice.

I give thanks
For the faithful of all the ages
Who have shown me
What it is to belong to you
Who have passed on wisdom
And given me words to pray.
For these treasures in the loft
I give thanks

And I ask for the grace to sort the rubbish of my days
That I may leave treasure for others
And for those who are, like me,
Still learners in the Kingdom of God.
Amen.