

Mt. 13:31, 44-52; Rom. 8: 26-39

St. Andrew's Totteridge: 8:00 & 10:00 a.m. service

27th July 2014: 6th Sunday after Trinity

*O God, help us to listen to your word with understanding, to receive it with faith, and to obey it with courage, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.*

### The 'Real World' of the Kingdom of Heaven

Good morning everyone – I hope you are all feeling well and happy this morning – but perhaps some of you aren't. Perhaps you didn't sleep well last night, perhaps you're feeling a bit of pain, perhaps you had an argument with a friend or a loved one. Can we lose heart? Can we be dismayed? Of course we can. Do we get depressed at the endless litany of bad news and disaster that confronts us in the news each day? Certainly – natural disasters, bereavements, waves of crime and violence, the brutal cruelties that humanity can inflict on each other – I don't think it's difficult to lose heart.

In our readings this morning I think Jesus and Paul are both trying to help us see through our immediate difficulties, through the mystery of suffering, into a bigger picture. Something referred to as the 'Kingdom of Heaven'. What is this place? Where is this place? There is something difficult and mysterious about the kingdom of heaven – Jesus speaks of it as though it is hidden, something not obvious, but as though it is a place of salvation. Only if we believe in the power of this place as a place of salvation can we be saved here and now.

Because in something small and apparently insignificant, like a mustard seed, there is nonetheless something packed with potential, capable of exponential growth, that can provide in ways beyond our imagination. In the case of the little mustard seed, from within its tiny form, a home for birds, their nests and their families, and over the years and generations perhaps thousands of birds and thousands of families, with all the repercussions and ripples of their presence radiating out across the centuries.

Perhaps this is the power of the kingdom of heaven, and perhaps it is possible to see in the parable of the mustard seed a microcosm of the whole of creation, an early articulation of a heavenly 'big bang' theory that radiates out across the whole universe. 'The Kingdom of heaven is like yeast...' (v.33) Jesus says, a mere powder that when added to flour has an unseen but extraordinary effect, transforming a flat, stale, chewy bread into a light, fluffy, fresh air-filled delight... I can almost smell the bakery from here. All this from the unseen, the insignificant, or the apparently powerless. Perhaps prayers are like mustard seeds.

I think we are like the merchant who searches for the pearl of great price; trouble is we all too often go chasing after the wrong pearl; or we bury it in that field and forget where we put it, 'out of sight out of mind' as the saying goes, instead of giving our all to keep it with us. Or we get dismayed, and lose heart, losing sight of the God who provides no matter what. The kingdom of heaven is like a fishing net that sorts all thing out, puts everything in the proper perspective, treasuring the truly valuable whether old or new.

What is sure is that whilst we may have love for the world, we must be sure that our love has not become inappropriate. Our treasures must be seen for what they are, that we do not live in a world of delusion. Towards the end of a poem called, appropriately enough, 'Welcome to the Real World' Godfrey Rust offers the following advice,

*And everything that seems real,  
that looks smart,  
that feels good,  
has a sell-by date.  
But love has no sell-by date.  
Love is long life.  
Love is the ultimate preservative.*

*I don't know too much about Love  
but I know a man who does,  
Up there on the cross  
loving us to death.*

*Love is the key  
to the door of the place he's prepared for you  
in the kingdom of God.*

*If you're beginning to understand  
then welcome to the real world.*

Paul says 'we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose' – this is hard to believe sometimes because we all struggle to see the bigger picture from the perspective of the kingdom of heaven – but Paul has been blessed with a powerful vision, a vision of the 'real world.' He knows, and I shall leave my final words to him – 'that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord'. Amen.

## Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

### The Parable of the Mustard Seed

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.'

### The Parable of the Yeast

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.'

### Three Parables

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.

### Treasures New and Old

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.'

## Romans 8:26-39

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. 27 And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

### God's Love in Christ Jesus

31 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33 Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

34 Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.' 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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