**How Amazing is Grace?**

Narrative Lectionary Epiphany 6

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Matthew 13: 24-43 Russell Mitchell-Walker

What is the Kingdom of Heaven like? In our reading today this is the question that Jesus explores through parables. Parables, according to CH Dodd are "a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought". Rather than being simple stories with one point, parables are often complex scenarios that can evoke all kinds of connections, not only with daily life, but also with other texts. In todays reading one of the parables is of the wheat and the weeds, which at first reading seems a simple message about good and bad people. However, in understanding the context, in Jewish Tradition, fields often represent the whole community, even the world, and so this story recognizes that, there is an inseparable mix of good and evil, good and bad in all of us, the wheat and weeds together sown. Things are not neatly divided or defined in life.

The Mustard seed is a parable about a small seed, often considered a weed, growing into something large and providing shelter for birds of all kinds. Although small, it’s power to nurture and sustain can exceed expectations. Maybe this is a message about people as well, sometimes people can surprise us in what they can do and offer. Have you ever known someone who you didn’t have much expectations of, to do something great that surprised you? Perhaps this is what the kingdom of heaven is like, being open to all people being nurtured and nurturing, welcomed and welcoming, regardless of who they are.

A few months ago, I presented the idea from Cynthia Bourgeault in one of Richard Rohr’s daily [meditations](https://cac.org/the-kingdom-of-heaven-2019-01-15/) that what Jesus means when he refers to the kingdom of heaven, is more a state of consciousness. An awakened sense of understanding and way of looking at the world. What might these parables mean in this sense? If the field is our being, and the wheat and weeds are the internal struggles we have with good and evil, then maybe in the end the evil or bad in us is cleansed or freed in us. Would that be an amazing grace?

This summer at Skylight Festival, we had a spoken word artist Micah Bournes who is black and progressive evangelical. He offered us a challenge at his Saturday night performance. He spoke about how he has been performing and doing this work of speaking truth of his reality through his poetry in many evangelical circles for years. He came to Skylight impressed by its commitment to diversity and justice, but looks out into the audience and sees the same sea of white faces. He told us that unless we do the work to change that and get representation reflective of the reality in our audience, then we might as well quit now. We took that to heart, and continued our work towards becoming a more diverse community by having a day of our face to face meeting in the fall committed to exploring the issues of white privilege and challenging the dominant cultural values. There is good and bad in us in the context of our socialization in a predominantly white culture, but we can learn about that and work for change and change our behaviour, the way we work, and communicate in a group. It means making space for those who are different from us, as one step to doing things differently.

One of the poems that Micah shared is called Freakshow and it speaks to our view of heaven and who will be there. A recurring line, is how amazing is grace – I invite you to listen for this message of God’s grace that welcomes those who turn from their ways, welcoming them into heaven. What surprises you, stops you, shocks you in this poem?

<https://micahbournes.bandcamp.com/track/freakshow-ft-kevin-anya-looper>

I now invite you to take some time to share in your tables your response to this poem, guided by the following questions.

* What is your view of heaven?
* How do you respond to this poem that has all kinds of people in heaven we may not expect, who have experienced God’s grace?
* how amazing is grace? How wide is God’s grace? Who will be welcome into God’s presence?

Response, insights, questions

May we go into this life with an open heart, to see how amazing is grace, as we acknowledge the good and bad intermingled in all of us. May we live out God’s abundant grace, in our day to day lives.

As we sing the Hymn, Amazing Grace, it is important to note that John Newton was a slave trader and wrote this hymn after turning from slave trade and experiencing God’s grace.