



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN

Here we go again. And this time more than one parable. What I have learned from years to studying these teachings of Jesus, is that they never get old. Each time this lectionary reading comes up, I seem to find something different to talk about. Times change and so do we, and how we look at these parables.

Remember, that they are simple stories using concrete imagery to make a single point. And once again, the single point is for us to have a view of what the kingdom of heaven looks like here on earth. In fact, I read this week from a Reverend Hoffacker that Jesus and a stand-up comic are similar.

The comedian comes out on stage and starts his routine. In a rapid-fire monologue he serves up jokes. His timing is masterful, and the one-liners burst forth in succession, with precision, so that you cannot help but laugh.

Jesus comes out in front of the crowds and starts his teaching. In a rapid-fire monologue, he serves up parables. His timing is masterful, and these word pictures burst forth in succession, with precision, so that you cannot help but see.

The comedian makes you laugh. Jesus makes you see, and what you see is something of the kingdom of heaven, that realm where God's sovereignty and power is recognized. And so, it is with the Gospel lesson today, quite the bonanza of parables all in a row. And they are all gems.

No weeds or wheat. But we do hear that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, like yeast, like buried treasure, like a merchant in search of fine pearls, and like a fish net filled

with good and rotten fish. That in itself is quite the diverse group of concrete images. Each one of these parables has a surprise of something unexpected.

The mustard seed is small yet grows to be a huge shrub, so large even birds can nest in it. Yeast, even a small amount can leaven a whole loaf of bread. These two parables are actually very similar. I think Jesus is saying that faith can appear small and insignificant but can change one's whole life. Faith the size of that mustard seed can move mountains.

The next two parables are also twins, if you will. Who does not like to hear stores of good fortune? From Aladdin to Treasure Island, to Survivor we are intrigued with treasure maps, magic lamps, and buried treasure. And I do suppose that people of Jesus' day liked them as well. Two things we can learn here about the Kingdom are that God comes to us in wondrous ways when we least expect it and that it is so valuable that it is worth giving up everything for.

The last parable reminds me of last Sunday's Gospel reading where the wheat and the weeds had to be separated at harvest. Today we have a net full of fish that are pulled to shore so the bad fish can be removed from the catch and the good ones used. So once again we are reminded that the Kingdom of Heaven contains both good and bad, righteous, and wicked that will be separated but not until the last day.

The one thing that all the parables have in common is that God has his hand in all of the stories. Only God can cause a seed to sprout, and yeast to grow in flour and water. He buries treasures when least expected, allows a pearl to be grown in an oyster having great value and He creates fish that are caught in the net. We see God's hand in all that has happened with these concrete images. To some it may seem surprising, that God can make all these things happen, but when we come to learn more about our maker and the vast universe, He gave us to enjoy, we are not so shocked by His power. I will never be able to understand how God knew to create the world, but I do know that He did so. God is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient with a huge dose of love to make it all work together for good. The surprise is that He did this all for us. He continues to bless his Kingdom of Heaven on earth for us each and every day and comes to us in so many ways.

God comes in a new-born baby brought to the baptismal font to be claimed as God's own child. God comes to us in forgiveness as we confess our sins. God comes to us in a Bible study and during Vacation Bible school. God comes to us when we are lonely and suffering, in sickness and health. God comes to us in the ordinary times as well as special times. And when God comes, He always brings blessings. Continually, God watches over each one of us and works out a plan for our life, a plan that showers us with His love and care. He has so many gifts for us, they are impossible to count, but the greatest of these gifts is the Kingdom of Heaven both here on earth and in eternity.

I am pretty sure you have heard the old story about the new arrival at the pearly gates. A voice asks, "what is the password? Speak it and you may enter." "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," said the person seeking entry. "No," replies the voice. "The just shall live by faith alone." "No," "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." "Those saying are all true," the voice answers, "But they are not

the password for which I listen.” “Well, then I give up,” replied the person seeking entry into heaven. “That’s it! Come right in!”

The Kingdom of Heaven is a free gift given to all who now Jesus Christ as their Savior and realize that they cannot make it in this life on their own. Relying on God’s amazing grace is the only way to live an abundant life here on earth. And God will comfort us on our bad days and continue to walk with us and share in the joy of the good days. Yes, there will be judgement at the end of the age, but not to worry if we confess our sins and let Jesus into our hearts as our Lord and Savior. Then there will be shouts of Thanksgiving at the end of the age when the final surprise of the Kingdom is revealed eternal life. AMEN