“There’s More”

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Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

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***31He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32it 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.” 33He 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; 46on 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; 48when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. 49So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50and 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.” 52And 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.”***

The lectionary has given us three consecutive weeks of parables. Each one has mentioned something about sowing seeds. First there was the extravagant scattering of seeds, everywhere, regardless of promise of successful growing. Then the weeds in and amongst the good wheat, posing as a wheat-look-alike until the very end, only in time for harvest. And finally today, the mustard seed.

How many of you listened to Janine read scripture, until a nano-second in she said “mustard seed?” You didn’t even realize that you’d stopped listening. The revere began in your head, remembering, “Oh, the mustard seed – yeah, I’ve heard this one before. I love it! I still cherish that necklace I got from mom, or maybe “that necklace I gave my daughter.” You know the one with the tiny mustard seed inside a little clear bubble? “I still have that up in the attic somewhere.” Or “I wonder what ever happened to that?”

Yes, the mustard seed. A tiny insignificant easy-to-miss thing, that ends up being *hard* to miss, and *extremely* significant for all of the birds that is capable of taking care of, and all the shade it provides. Lots to say there.

But really. Enough with the sowing of seeds already!

Not to worry. Jesus has always been one to cover all the bases. For those who got distracted by the mustard seed memories earlier, let me help you out. There was more.

Not only is today’s text another parable, it’s as if Jesus wanted to blurt it all out at once, giving us *five* parables at one time.

After the mustard seed Jesus continued to describe the Kingdom of heaven – as yeast, treasure, a one of a kind pearl, and a fishing net.

The first three remind are about things that are *hidden*.

The fourth parable is about the *value* of the kingdom of heaven.

And the last one is about a net that *takes in all kinds*, and like the weeds and wheat – the sorting comes at the end.

The kingdom of heaven is hidden. It’s hidden everywhere right in front of us. We don’t see it at first sometimes because unlike human kingdoms that are large and loud and vast, the kingdom of heaven is often that tiny glimpse that you might have missed if you didn’t turn your head just then; or if you had taken your morning walk down another block; or answered the phone on the last ring, deciding not to let it go to voice mail after all. Can you think of one of those times? Something happens, and you get a glimpse of what turns out to be the kingdom of heaven.

I was on my patio yesterday, sitting, as I do, with cup of coffee number two. My door is usually wide open so the cat can come and go onto the patio. So when a hummingbird darted across my view, first I gasped and then I just stared at it, really hoping it would not go into my apartment! There I was staring when it quickly darted closer to me, and just hovered in front of my nose for maybe a full 2 seconds and disappeared! I thought to myself, “I think I just got smacked in the face by God!” And then I said to myself, “Remember this.”

Like the mustard seed, this tiny flash of time carried within it a huge God moment for me.

Another way to be hidden is when everything is mixed together.

*“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.”*

This parable about yeast isn’t just things being mixed together like a bowl of party mix, where one can still see which things are which. A little yeast mixed with not just one measure of flour, but three measures of flour, will be so blended and mixed that the yeast can no longer be found at all. Just that tiny bit of yeast was able to completely transform all of that flour. The yeast in the parable is hidden also, but is a little different than the hidden mustard seed. The mustard seed is tiny and then the seed *itself* becomes greater. The yeast though remains itself a small quantity, but it the *cause* of the growth around it.

Next comes the treasure hidden in a field. Just one sentence, and so many questions. “*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.”* Wait. Was the treasure hidden by someone and then found by someone *else*, who then hid it *again*, in a *different* field? Was it that same person’s field, or an empty lot next to a chain link fence? If it wasn’t their field, what were they doing digging in someone else’s field? If it was their field, then they wouldn’t have had to buy it? Too bad the Writer’s Guild folks are on strike, or they could make sense of that scene and work it out for us.

The treasure is hidden. Even after someone found it, they hid it again to keep it safe. The treasure was worth so much that the person was willing to change their life so that they could keep the treasure. The value was so high, the person had to sell everything. This raises an interesting real world question for us to ask ourselves. Have we ever *voluntarily* changed our lives so much that *nothing* was the same again? I’m sure we can think of the times when our lives have been *involuntarily* changed forever. Illnesses in particular. The death of a friend or loved one that leaves us shattered. But if we’ve made a life changing move, voluntarily, perhaps we know the feeling of freedom, of breathing, the feelings of certainty and joy and sense of direction and purpose that we eventually settle into. When we have had to be brave and leave the dangerous situation we are in. When we have had to be brave and leave what we know so that we can be somewhere where we don’t have to hide who we are. When the hidden kingdom of heaven is found, it is worth everything.

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; 46on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.”*

The pearl is not hidden, but it was unknown. Once found, the merchant recognized it, and sold everything so that he could have it. The value was great enough to sell all and purchase the pearl.

Lastly, the kingdom of heaven is like the fishermen’s net, cast out and gathers fish of every kind. God’s net takes in anyone.

Whether the listener is a farmer, a woman even – women’s work would not have seemed of value to anyone listening – a sure reason for Jesus to include it; a thief who finds a treasure in a field that was not his to begin with; or a merchant who decides to bet the bank to get the pearl; or a fisherman. Jesus covered all bases in today’s parables, in order to not leave anyone out. *Everyone* who heard, should now understand what the kingdom of heaven is.

How does the 21st century Church hear these parables? I think we are called to notice the things that are missing from these kingdom of heaven parables. These parables all speak about a single thing. One mustard seed. One woman mixing yeast and flour. One man who finds a treasure. One merchant who finds the perfect pearl. Also, when these parables describe the value of the kingdom of heaven, the person sells all that he has to get it. There is no parable here that includes the man who has nothing to sell. Do those with nothing not get to experience the kingdom of heaven?

The call of the 21st century church is to remember first, that *we are not one* person – we are a community. We concern ourselves with individuals yes, but in service to the community, both local and afar. We have personal experiences of the kingdom of heaven, if we’re lucky, but we don’t stop there. Secondly, we concern ourselves with *those with nothing* to sell, trade, or give so that they can experience the kingdom of heaven. Our job is to *bring the kingdom of heaven to* them. After all, we didn’t sell, trade, or give anything to earn or deserve the grace that a life with

God brings us. We were the ones with nothing, once. The mission of a church is one way the community of the church brings the kingdom of heaven to those without anything. The Church needs to model a better way of being society. Less transactional and more grace filled.

A grace filled life does not try to make things even. A grace filled life aims to leave the other with more. A grace filled life is generous. A grace filled life leaves the punishing and judgement to God. A grace filled life doesn’t end things looking for someone to win and someone to lose. A grace filled life seeks a win-win.

The more the Church as a community and people of faith as individuals can be a model for a grace filled life, the more the Church will become relevant to the world again. I invite us to challenge ourselves this week, to show grace when we’d rather get even; show grace when we’d rather win the argument; show grace when someone pushes our buttons; show grace when a loved one disappoints us. Because that’s what God did for us.

Let us pray…

<https://cepreaching.org/commentary/2017-07-24/matthew-1331-33-44-52/>

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