



**Devotionals: 30 - 31 July
& 1 – 5 August 2023**

**Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52: Jesus' Use of
Parables**

Prayer: Diligent Lord, who watches over us, at all times, be with us all these days. We confess that we have allowed a host of worries and frustrations to crowd out your word for us. As you give us peace and your transforming love, also forgive all those times when we have been less than faithful disciples. Gently visit us again with your healing powers. Restore our hope and courage and joy for all the times ahead. We ask this in the name of the Master Healer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Each of the last two weeks, the lectionary gave us two chunks of the chapter so that we would hear a long parable and Jesus' own long explanation of it. The word for "parable" is *parabole*--literally, "thrown alongside." Parables are stories "thrown alongside" life, you might say, which prompt comparisons and contrasts between the two. We had the Parable of the Sower. Then we had the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds. This week's two chunks bring us whole string of tiny little parables. Five of them, actually. Five descriptions of the Kingdom of heaven.

This is the third reading in a row from chapter 13, a chapter of parables. Parables included in this selection are the parable of the mustard seed, the leaven, the treasure in the field, the pearl, the net, and the throwing out of treasure. The parables highlight Jesus' role as teacher, a very important theme in Matthew's gospel.

When you look at this string of five parables it is easy to think they are all part of the same speech. The lectionary selection is sort of hiding the context. He tells the first two parables to the crowd. Then the disciples head into the house for the explanation of the parable of the wheat and the weeds. And without heading back out to the crowd, Jesus jumps back into three more, similarly short, parables. Two to the crowd. Three to the disciples. All very similar.

All five little parables are his explanations of what the kingdom of heaven is like. In my own imagination I imagine Jesus' disciples pestering Him with the same question, day after day, trying to get a clear grasp on what this mysterious "Kingdom of Heaven" is all about. In any case, the lectionary does us a favor in giving us all five of these short definitions, or comparisons, or defining comparisons, in one bunch.

So, the question "What is the Kingdom of Heaven like?" could also be asked "What is it like when God rules?" or "What is it like in the world when God's rule is spreading and growing?" Well, it is not an easy question to answer.

Read these five parables together and you get a patchwork definition of the Kingdom we are citizens of, trying to build, and waiting to be fulfilled. And frankly it is not the kind of thing you might deduce from looking at the Church, where we most hope to see signs of the Kingdom.

The parables tell us the kingdom of heaven is like...

- A mustard seed.
- Yeast.
- Treasure hidden in a field.
- A merchant in search of fine pearls.
- A net thrown into the sea.

I love the way that there is not just one answer to the question "What is the kingdom of heaven like?" It isn't simple. Nor

is it obvious. It isn't a precise or concise or systematically rigid thing, this Kingdom of Heaven.

The answer has all the variety and richness of living and working. The Kingdom of Heaven is like...

- A seed growing, full of life.
- Yeast, full of life, turning flour into dough for baking.
- A treasure just waiting to be found.
- A treasure hunter looking for riches.
- A net that scoops up whatever it finds.

I think it is delightful that these images are active, or at least full of energy.

- That mustard seed is tiny, but it grows persistently until it is more useful than one would imagine—not only does it make mustard, but it provides a home for the birds.
- The baker “hides” the yeast in something like 60 pounds of flour, leavening enough dough to feed a whole town.
- That treasure is so clearly valuable that a treasure hunter will sell every single possession to own it. And all the while it is just lying there, underground, waiting to be found.
- That merchant knows so much about pearls — he can tell that this one he's found is worth everything he has. So, he cashes it all in to buy the one pearl.
- That net is open to all, and catches all, and draws all in — the sorting will come later.

Among these parables of the Kingdom, I find the treasure and the merchant striking. It is easy to accidentally turn them into the same story. Jesus makes the Kingdom two opposite parts of a process.

First, the kingdom is something to seek, a treasure hidden in a field. We seem to be the ones who find the treasure-which-is-the-Kingdom. We are, for some reason, digging in a field; our shovel hits something hard - buried treasure! The only way to own that treasure is to buy the field. We are guilty and want forgiveness; or we're broken and want to be made whole; or we see Jesus, the King, and want to belong to him. But we must buy the field. When we buy the field to get the Kingdom, we get the whole of Christianity that bears Christ and salvation to us. We get the Church in its glory. We get doctrines and fellow Christians we can travel the journey and fellowship with. Followers of Christ, to get the treasure, buy the field.

Second, the kingdom is someone seeking a treasure: a merchant looking for a priceless pearl. The Kingdom of Heaven is not the pearl, but the one seeking to buy it. It isn't the Kingdom-which-is-the-pearl but the Kingdom-which-is-the-merchant.

We are the pearl — despite what we see when we do a self-evaluation of our life. Christ the King is the one who comes seeking, who finds us, values us, and wants us for his own. Christ is the one who sells all to buy us. This is the Good News: We have been judged to be precious, and the Living God has come, given Jesus' very life as a sacrifice, and made each of us God's very own.

So, what is the Kingdom of Heaven Like in These Parables? The Kingdom of Heaven is like a seed. No matter how tiny, it grows in the most surprising ways to become more than anyone ever imagined. Treasure the seed you have been given.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast. Mix it in, hide it in flour, it turns out to be a living thing. It turns a huge barrel of flour into a vast quantity of dough. Eventually we'll find enough oven space to bake it. Meanwhile, treasure God's yeast that is working its way through your life.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure. It is there, waiting to be found. Dig until you find it. Give all you have and all you are to make it your own. Go and get the treasure.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant. He knows pearls. He's persistent. He knows what he's looking for. He'll find a pearl, even one closed tightly in a rough and crusty oyster shell. He'll do all he must to make that pearl his own. Rejoice, with awe and wonder, that you are that precious pearl.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net. The King tosses it out and drags in everything — salmon, tuna, carp,

mackerel. Whatever. He'll decide what to do with every single fish.

I'll admit this parable ends on a scary note. But the fisher king is also the merchant of fine pearls. He wouldn't draw you in if he didn't have good plans for you.

PRAYING TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER –
YOU'RE NOT ALONE, LET US PRAY WITH YOU & FOR YOU
PRAYERS WILL BE ANSWERED

- **Mr. Tom Damp** has been comfortable and safe in his home for years. This has been possible primarily due to home healthcare services. However, with significant changes in coverage from health insurance, availability of in-home health care personnel, and other life circumstances, Mr. Tom is having to make unexpected decisions; stay in his home or transition to assisted living. He asks for your prayers and care as God reveals, God's plan for his new season. Caring Father, we thank you for the opportunity we have as a church family to pray and care for Mr. Tom Damp. We ask that you bless him with the resources to keep safe from harm. Please surround this whole process with your wisdom and mercy, Lord. We pray for Mr. Tom's health and care in this whole process. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen. Card and noted can be mailed to: **Mr. Tom Damp, 1707 Sunset Ridge Drive, West Bend WI 53095.**
- No one enters this life a follower of Christ. If we are God's children, it is because we were born spiritually sometime after we were born physically. God uses our prayers as one of the means of drawing people, including our grandchildren, to God. We lift up prayers of healing and strength for **Mr. Ben Barth**, fiancé of Ms. Heather Wolf, granddaughter of Mr. Roger and Mrs. Mary Rogge. Mr. Ben has been given a new heart and new lungs but is experiencing kidney concerns. Cards of prayers for healing and restoration can be mailed to: **Mr. Ben Barth, 969 Tuscola Lane, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- God, our Heavenly Father, bless these **Christian men**, that they may find strength, courage, and unspeakable joy as fathers. Let the example of their faith and love shine forth. Grant that we, their sons, and daughters, may honor them always with a spirit of profound respect. We pray that our fathers who have passed into the next life have been welcomed into Your loving embrace, and that our family will one day be reunited in your heavenly kingdom. Give them the strength to do well by their children and by You. In Your Holy name, O God, we pray. Amen.
- **Ms. Linda Green**, sister of Mrs. Debra Matthies, thank you for your continued prayers for strength and courage. She has just celebrated her birthday and give God thanks and praise. Please send birthday cards and/or cards of support to: **Ms. Linda Green, 2920 Donahue Ferry Road, Pineville, LA 71360.**
- **Family and Friends** of Fifth Ave. United Methodist Church, may we increasingly learn to regard the various trials we face as pure joy and the inevitable difficulties that come our way as glorious opportunities to rejoice in God. I pray that we may face our daily trials joyfully, knowing that the testing of our faith will produce endurance and steadfastness. May we increase our dependence upon God during good times and bad. "Lord, give me the courage to face the challenges and ills that come. Help me to persevere and not give up. Give me the strength to face these storms. Pour out your peace over me and keep me in your perfect peace. Amen.
- We remain in prayer and support for **Mrs. Ann Cording**. Great Physician, you can heal us in a heartbeat. We pray for God's miraculous healing today. Take our pain away, according to Your will, in Your time. We're not promised a painless life on this earth, but You do want us to live a happy one. Send Your Spirit to help us see past our circumstances and onto Your calling on our lives. Sickness and injury can't stop God-placed dreams. Fill our hearts with hope as we wait on You to move in our lives and flow out from our hearts. In Jesus' Name, Amen. Cards and notes of love and care can be mailed to: **Mrs. Ann Cording, 1416 S. Silverbrook Drive, West Bend WI 53095.**
- Our deepest sympathies are extended to **Mrs. Shari Weiss**, sister of Mrs. Kathy Schneider, on the passing of her husband, Mr. Mike Weiss. Mr. Mike struggled for a long time with health concerns; eternal rest grant unto Mr. Mike, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen. Cards and notes of condolences and sympathies can be mailed to: **Mrs. Shari Weiss, c/o Mrs. Kathy Schneider, 2107 Maple Dale Drive, West Bend, WI 53090.**
- We celebrate and honor **Mr. Roger Rogge**, Army veteran for his patriotism, love of country, and sacrifice for our common good. On June 17, 2023, **Mr. Roger Rogge** traveled on the **Honor Flight to Washington D.C.** The mission of the Honor Flight is to help veterans share their stories with future generations and give them the homecoming that many never received as it provides an experience that heals our veterans and our nation. Thank you to the many that

sent cards which were given to **Mr. Roger's** upon his return to Mitchell Airport. **CARDS and NOTES** can still be sent to: **Mr. Roger Rogge, 4436 Magna Vista Drive, Jackson, WI 53037.**

- **We still need YOU! We need leaders and volunteers to serve in various positions on committees and boards. You may not think you have the gift, talent, and/or time to serve, but all are called to work in the kingdom. We need you!**
- **Ms. Alana Dalton** is still on the road of healing from her fractured humerus bone. Amen. Continued support and love can be mailed to: **Mr. Leslie and Mrs. Alana Dalton, 4959 Lake Drive, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- We hold **Mrs. Shirley Simmons** in our hearts. Bless those who mourn, eternal God, with the comfort of your love that they may face each new day with hope. May their memories become joyful, their days enriched with friendship, and their lives encircled by your love. Amen. Cards and messages of love and support can be mailed to **Mrs. Shirley Simmons & Family, 2908 Valley Avenue, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- It is with deep and heartfelt sadness that I share the unexpected passing of **Ms. Christy Gust.** We extend our deepest condolences to her mother, Mrs. Norma Pearson. Cards and notes of care and support can be mailed to: **Mrs. Norma Pearson 5230 East 66th Way, #302A, Commerce City, CO 80022.** Lord in your mercy; hear our prayer.
- **Bro. Bob Krell** is rooted in our hearts as we shower him and the Family with our love, care and support. He is grateful and humbled for your prayers and cards of restoration, strength and miraculous healing. Thank you, God, for hearing and answering our prayer. Cards and notes of love and encouragement can be mailed to: **Bro. Bob and Mrs. Jean Krell, 804 Lenora Drive, West Bend, WI 53090.**
- **Ms. Sandy Wamser** having been diagnosed with Epilepsy, is still working with her medical team to find the correct medications and doses to control the seizures. She is very grateful for your love, prayers, and support. Special prayers for Mr. Pat as he cares for Ms. Sandy. Cards and notes can be sent to: **Mr. Pat and Mrs. Sandy Wamser, 3742 Pleasant Valley Road, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- **Ms. Nancy Whitson** is still admitted at The Pavilion at Glacier Valley. She requests your prayers and support as she continues to journey with health concerns. Please send cards and notes of encouragement to: **Mrs. Nancy Whitson, 922 Hickory Street, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- **Mr. Don Walters** is still experiencing several medical challenges. We're keeping Ms. Joyce in our thoughts and prayers as well. Letters and notes of encouragement and love can be mailed to: **Mr. Don and Mrs. Joyce Walters, 5368 Woodlawn Summit, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- **Mr. Chuck Rogge** is still on a journey of healing. He is grateful for the cards and notes of support. Please continue to flood the mailbox with love and support to: **Mr. Chuck and Mrs. Sue Rogge, 5011 Hwy. P, West Bend, WI 53095.**
- **Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf**, appreciates your continued prayers for healing and strength as she continues to struggle with illness. You can send emails of prayers and support to: alankempf33@gmail.com; or cards and notes to **Mr. Allan and Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf, 414B. South Pleasantview Road, Plymouth, WI 53073; phone number: 920.838.1830.**

We continue to celebrate our 175th year of service, commitment and Methodism in West Bend, Wisconsin.

“Honoring Our Past, Celebrating Our Present, Anticipating Our Future”

Prayer: Guide the Church to feed your flock as Christ wonderfully fed the multitude. Make your faithful people, being rooted and grounded in love, instruments of your love to all people. Amen

**With passionate hope, love, and the promise of your Resurrection,
your humble Pastor-servant leaders,**

Pastor Clarissa & Bro. Martin