

Trinity 7 2017 Godfrey Hilliard

The parables found in Matthew are very basic and human and deal with everyday things. Jesus tells stories of lost sheep, seeds in fields or workers in a vineyard. Jesus uses simple everyday encounters that the listeners would understand and even with which they could identify.

There is relief in the fact that even Jesus used simple, every day, ordinary examples. Of course this was not because Jesus couldn't use grander language, but rather we couldn't have understood it otherwise. Most of the time the disciples ask Jesus to explain what he meant because they could not understand his meaning. Jesus made often surprising, comparisons between that which was holy and that which was secular. Allowing us the opportunity to see things and understand things differently. As a result, in many regards, the passage we read this morning is no different from other parables because Jesus does use the ordinary to explain the extraordinary. However, unlike other parables, Jesus launches into these comparisons leaving little time for lead up or the usual Q&As. The similes and metaphors come quickly, with no warning or preparation, no explanation and certainly no story. Perhaps Jesus doesn't want those hearing him to think too much about them or get stuck on one verse another. Or perhaps Jesus is teaching us to see the kingdom of heaven in all of creation, no matter how ordinary, no matter how simple, no matter what our situation.

The comparison of the mustard seed and the yeast are easy enough. Two very basic items that aren't very impressive but the results can be astounding- a tree big enough for birds to nest in, bread enough to feed the family for days. The kingdom of heaven is like this because it is surprising, powerful and there is more to it than meets the eye. But then it becomes more difficult to identify the aspects of the kingdom within the other items. Finding buried treasure is based on luck. A rich man becomes richer because he is good at his trade and knows when one pearl is better than the rest. The final comparison makes us believe that it is not about us finding it but rather it finding us. Other than being ordinary items or strange amounts of luck these metaphors seems to have little in common, in fact some seem contrary to others.

The striking thing about all these images is that they are not obvious. The mustard seed hidden in the ground; the yeast hidden in the dough, the treasure hidden in the field, the pearl hidden and the net hidden in the depths of the sea.

If the kingdom of heaven is like these, then it is not something readily apparent to the eye but something that must be searched for, something just below the surface of things waiting there to be discovered and claimed?

When we understand the hidden nature of all these items it sounds like the kingdom of heaven is mythical, is the stuff not of the ordinary but of fairy tales. Jesus refers to buried treasure after all! If we look at them as items hidden, waiting to be exposed, items that are suddenly discovered and change lives then they are less ordinary.

But that is the key; the kingdom of heaven only becomes the kingdom of heaven when it is revealed. These items are useless if they remain hidden, the seed does nothing if it is not buried first, the yeast is tasteless until it is placed in the dough, the treasure has no value until it is found, the pearl means nothing until someone in the know has the right eye, the net produces nothing until it is pulled up from the sea-but when these items are used and found, their full potential is recognized.

But sometimes we have to deal with situations like Charlie Gard, a young baby who was very human but had a condition that was incurable, and I hope his parents have not been manipulated by those with their own agenda.

What do you say to Charlie Goad's parents about the Kingdom of God?

What do you say to the family of a 52 year old who died rapidly of cancer leaving a wife and three teenage children?

What do you say to families whose lives are changed by economic disaster and find themselves at the mercy of a Foodbank in order to eat?

What on earth does the Kingdom of Heaven mean to them?

The answer is probably not a lot! Do we actually know what is meant?

"Have you understood all these things?" Jesus asked.

"Yes," they replied.

⁵² *He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."*

The Kingdom of Heaven could be likened to our historic military brasses that are hidden under the carpet in the chancel. We know they are there but we hide them away to stop them from being damaged rather than do something that will make it possible for them to be shown off in all their glory. To that end I had a conversation with the Cobham Heritage organisation and with their interest and as part of our own Vision 2017 objectives of taking our church out into the community, we are going to work together to forward our plan to cover them with glass so that they are there for all the world to see.

As Christians it is our responsibility to support all those who need our help, to give to those who are in need, to support the lonely, bereaved and those who have lost hope.

That is what Jesus was talking about as he tried to relate everything of this world to the things of God.

Jesus' followers gain understanding through both the ministry of the Holy Spirit who enlightens their minds and the further explanations that Jesus gives to them in private. Jesus' enemies lose even what understanding they did have of the Old Testament prophecies because they are limited to their own wisdom and the devil blinds their minds to the truth.

So we gain insight by leaving ourselves open to the Holy Spirit so that we can begin to understand where and what the Kingdom of Heaven really means.

Amen.