



Roanoke, Virginia

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“Kingdom Consciousness”

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

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31 He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32 it 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.”

33 He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with[a] three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

44 “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and reburied; 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; 46 on 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; 48 when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. 49 So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50 and 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.” 52 And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

Chapter 13 is a collection of parables. We have the parable of the sower and its explanation; we have the parable of the weeds and wheat and its explanation—which actually comes a bit later; we have the parables of the mustard seed, yeast, hidden treasure, fine pearl, casting net; and some even include the parable of the scribe the concludes our reading today in this long list.

As we have learned from previous sermons from this pulpit, the word *parable* is derived from the Greek verb meaning “to throw beside”—to say it another way “to set side by side.” That is, to compare. To throw one thing, one idea beside another.

Yet, we must keep in mind, as Douglas Hare writes in his commentary, that “behind Matthew’s Greek stand the Hebrew Scriptures, where the word *mashal* was used for enigmatic speech” ... “whose meaning was not immediately apparent.”¹ He explains that the idea of *mashal* helps better understand the use of parables here, not merely as comparative language, but rather as a riddle of sorts, “intended to tease the mind into insight rather than communicate a simple idea by means of an illustration.”²

What he is saying is that these parables are riddles.

So, I have a few riddles for you:

I am the rare case when today comes before tomorrow and yesterday. What am I?

- A dictionary

What does the letter T and an island have in common?

- They both can be found in the middle of WATER

I get bigger the more you take away, and when you put me in a bucket, I make it lighter.

What am I?

- A hole

What has 13 hearts, but no other organ?

- A deck of cards

Last one: If you have me, you will want to share me. But if you share me, you will no longer have me. What am I?

- A secret

¹ Douglas Hare, Interpretation, John Knox Press, pg. 146

² 147



Now, if we take this insightful, enigmatic energy to the parables, they no longer simply compare two things. They become for us riddles that conceal and reveal characteristics of “the kingdom of heaven,” which then offers what our final parable speaks to... bringing out from treasure something new and something old.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field...
The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman mixed in with 3 measures of flour...

Both the mustard seed and the yeast have been treated as parables of growth. The mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, grows to become the “greatest of all shrubs and becomes a tree.” To be honest, mustard is closer to a weed than wheat, because of its invasiveness. This and the fact that Jesus states a farmer sowed the seed would have shocked his audience. Once it grows it is very hard to get rid of it. Additionally, the now great mustard tree is attracting all kinds of birds, which, again, is something farmers would not want. And Jesus’ hearers would know this.

Then the yeast. Just a small amount of yeast, when added to flour, can make the entire batch rise. Well, this parable is misnamed. We know yeast as it comes in those little packets we can get at the supermarket. One commentator writes that Jesus is referring to leaven, not yeast. Leaven is a rotting, molding lump of bread, and is usually a negative symbol of corruption.³ Furthermore, the woman actually “hides” this “corruption” into three measures of flour, enough to yield bread that would feed 100 people. Again, this is something that would seem odd to Jesus’ hearers.

Both can be read as parables of growth: the growth of God’s kingdom from small and humble beginnings into grandness that welcomes all kinds of species; the small amount of yeast that is added will cause the whole batch to rise.

Could there be something more concealed in these parables, in these riddles, that we aren’t seeing yet?

Then we have the hidden treasure and the fine pearl.

The kingdom of heaven is like hidden treasure, which a man found in a field and reburied—
The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls—

The hidden treasure is stumbled upon by the man, who then digs it up, reburies it in a location known only to him, and he goes and sells all he has to buy the land with the treasure re-

³ Mark G. Vitalis Hoffman, “Commentary on Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52” published July 24th, 2011 for *Working Preacher*.
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/ordinary-17/commentary-on-matthew-1331-33-44-52-2>



hidden. Is the man's behavior ethical? Does he just sit on the land, keeping the treasure for himself? And the merchant who is searching for fine pearls—his treasure—and upon finding what he has been searching for, he sells all that he has to purchase that single pearl. What does he do with it? Does he keep it to himself?

Remember our riddle from earlier, a secret is yours as long it is not shared. Can this be the comparison Jesus wanted to preach about the kingdom of heaven? Or does it speak more to what Jesus said to the rich young man later in Matthew: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

Parables provide many interpretations. The treasure and pearl continue the earlier theme of the "smallness" of the kingdom—treasure found in a big field, one pearl among many—as well as continue the theme of the "hiddenness" of the kingdom. Another interpretation is that they illustrate the cost of discipleship and the ultimate treasure that is God's kingdom. Another interpretation is that they speak to the incomparable worth of the kingdom and the necessity to do all we can to obtain it. All are good and fair interpretations.

But as riddles, as enigmatic speech intended to tease the mind into insight, tease the mind into reflection, and response, what else could they be telling us?

To understand the riddle, we must understand what the kingdom of heaven is.

What is the kingdom of heaven? is a question that has been debated by biblical scholars for as long as there have been biblical scholars.

Some assume it is the place you go when you die—well if you have been "saved." But the challenge is that Jesus himself contradicts this understanding when he says that the kingdom is *within* you and that the kingdom is *at hand*. That is, the kingdom of heaven is here and now. The kingdom of heaven is not a place you go or find when you die. It is something now, it is within and at hand. As author and episcopal priest Cynthia Bourgeault says, The kingdom of heaven is "not later, but *lighter*—some more subtle quality or dimension of experience accessible to you right in the moment. *You don't die into it; you awaken into it.*"⁴

Still others say the kingdom of heaven is an earthly utopia of peace and justice. This idea assumes a once-and-for-all harmonious community where wealth is shared, rights are equal, and all live as one. The Apostle Paul speaks a lot about this. Yet Jesus, when his followers wanted to proclaim his Messiahship as anointed king of Israel to bring about God's ultimate reign and justice and peace upon the earth, he responded saying, "My kingdom is not of this world."

⁴ <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/the-kingdom-of-heaven-2019-01-15/>



So, what is the kingdom of heaven?

In his book, *Putting on the Mind of Christ: The Inner Work of Christian Spirituality*, Jim Marion suggests that the kingdom of heaven is a “state of consciousness”—it is not a place you go or find, but rather a place you come from... It is an awareness that sees no separation—not between God and humans, not between humans and other humans.⁵ It is a new way of looking at the world.

Jesus says to his disciples, “blessed are your eyes, for they see... many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it...”

These parables, as *masal*, offer us riddles that open our eyes to the kingdom of heaven in the here and now, teasing the mind into reflection and response.

They draw us into a *kingdom of consciousness*.

The mustard seed and leaven open our eyes to the truth of God’s action in the tiny movements and moments of life. They reveal a new understanding of God’s primary reality right now, shaping and transforming what we thought to be true. The kingdom of heaven is the scandalous claim that sees a weed give sanctuary to a multitude of birds. The kingdom of heaven is the outrageous idea that grace, mercy, and love can “corrupt” three measures of flour and make the entire batch rise, transforming it into something new.

The kingdom of heaven is the reality that claims what is will not always be.

Kingdom Consciousness is an awareness that transforms the things we hold as treasure. When we become aware of God’s divine action in the tiniest movements and moments of life, we see the hidden treasure and spot the fine pearl, and life then becomes one of joyful response.

(Pause)

Beloved, there are within the world we live small and hidden wonders of God’s divine action. And if we have eyes to see such wonder, everyday life of schedule and routine will be disrupted and transformed, and then with joy we can celebrate the ever-present kingdom of heaven, in the here and now, and so too then become participants.

What is the kingdom of heaven like...

Poet Lo Alaman says this: The kingdom of heaven is the reality that the “God of the impossible might defy gravity in our hearts...as God uses us to create a world of weightless wonder, that wherever we go we turn it into heaven.”⁶

What is the kingdom of heaven like...

⁵ Jim Marion, *Putting on the Mind of Christ: The Inner Work of Christian Spirituality* (Hampton Roads Publishing Company: 2000; 2nd ed., 2011).

⁶ From his poem “Imagine”



The kingdom of heaven is like a dandelion, when a young boy saw it growing beside the sidewalk, he shouted to his friends, and they celebrated its beautiful yellow color together!

The kingdom of heaven is like a note written to a young girl, a note that reminded her of her potential, that washed away her insecurities, and became for her a mantra of life that she can be and do anything!

The kingdom of heaven is like a friend, who sits with another, holding their hand in the waiting room as a diagnosis is shared.

The kingdom of heaven is like the 100 kids, youth, and volunteers who joined together last week at Vacation Bible School to learn about and be the body of Christ at the table.

The kingdom of heaven is like an open table, with seats for all people of all shapes and sizes, of all color and race, people young and old, where the invitation is to dine with Jesus, who was and is and shall ever be, the heavenly and earthly host.

I wonder what the kingdom of heaven is like to you.

Because once you figure out the riddle, once you have eyes to see, you will never again miss the truth of God's love, grace, and mercy, that is the kingdom of heaven, right in front of you.

To God be the glory, now and forever. Amen.

