

Genesis 29:15-28  
Psalm 105:1-11, 45b  
Romans 8:26-39  
Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost  
St. Barnabas Bainbridge Island  
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### The Treasure Worth Giving Your Life For

When I was a young girl, I had a gold necklace with a tiny glass orb that contained an even tinier mustard seed. The top of the orb had a gold connector glued to it so the orb could not be opened and the mustard seed couldn't come out. My mustard seed was so tiny that it seemed to float around inside that glass ball. And every once in a while, if I was very quiet, I could hear it rolling around. I wore that necklace, along with my gold cross, for years and years and years. I've gone looking for it several times in my adult life, but it is not to be found. And while I'm not so much of a "things" person, that necklace was very precious to me. It was a reminder of the truth that in God's hands, tiny things turn into great things. A reminder that my faith, even the tiniest bit of real faith, even only a mustard's seed worth of faith, could change everything. It was a reminder that God was always with me and that I belonged to God.

We've come to the parable extravaganza in this Sunday's readings, and that extravaganza starts with a mustard seed. Jesus has just finished telling the stories of the good sower sowing seeds with abandon and the bad sower sowing weeds alongside the wheat, and going to great lengths to describe and discuss every nuance. He'd even gone so far as to explain all those nuances. But apparently that wasn't enough. It's as though someone had not understood and said – "yes, Jesus, but could you say more?"

And so he did. He put before them parable after parable after parable after parable after parable. The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, like yeast, like a treasure, like a pearl, like a net teeming with fish of every kind. It was all so fast, with one parable heaped on top of another without a moment's pause nor an explanation of any of them.

If somebody asked you, how would you describe the kingdom of Heaven? Or your experience of God's presence in your life? Or the mystery of the Eucharist? These are things we don't have words for. Oh, we can talk around them, and we do. We try to convey what such things are and what they mean, but the truth is, we don't really know what they are or what they mean. We only know how we experience them and that they have a profound impact on our lives... an impact we can't really put into words. "It's like this or like that" we say. "It's like a mustard seed or yeast or a treasure or a pearl or a net teeming with fish of every kind," Jesus says. Some things can't be explained with words, they only become known in our experiences. Jesus knew that. It's why he used the experiences of people's lives to show them – not tell them, but to show them God's presence and action in their lives. The farmers understood what it was like to have weeds among their wheat. They knew what it was to try to farm rocky soil or have birds eat all their seeds. And because Jesus wants others to know, today he speaks in the language of women baking bread, of merchants buying and selling, of treasure hunters and fishermen too.

I think that's one reason all these parables that speak of so many different lives get all piled up on top of each other. The mere act of putting them all together is also what the Kingdom of Heaven is like... the Kingdom of Heaven is like a room filled with people of all kinds who know God through the experiences of their own very different lives. That's how Jesus teaches. He speaks to us of the experiences of our own lives, helping us to see and to hear with the eyes and the ears of our hearts. And in doing that – in using the ordinary things of our lives to tell the marvelous stories of God's unspeakable generosity and boundless love - he shows us how our lives – how all lives - are holy. He shows us how "the experiences of our lives, when we let God use them, become the mysterious and perfect preparation for the work God will give us to do."<sup>1</sup>

*The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, the tiniest of seeds that will indeed grow into something very big. But what we need to pay attention to here is that Jesus is comparing the Kingdom to the seed, to the thing that's been sown. The kingdom of heaven is like a tiny seed hidden deep in the ground, something we might not even know is there until it grows into the most marvelous and unimaginable and fruitful tree. It's like the early church, isn't it? Little groups of people hidden away in back rooms, meeting together, sharing the story, encouraged and emboldened by God's Holy Spirit AND each other, growing into what we know as Christianity today. It's true for us too. God has sown the seed of the kingdom of heaven in each and every one of us.*

*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. Just a bit of yeast in three measures of flour leavens the whole – all of it – so much that it's enough bread to feed hundreds of people. If the Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast that leavens all the flour, turning it into bread for the masses, then the Kingdom is a place of profound inclusiveness and generosity.*

*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. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. A treasure and a pearl, things that were also hidden, things that remind us the Kingdom is present whether or not we recognize it, that sometimes we have to go searching for it, and that it sometimes just comes upon us. But whether we've been searching for our treasure or simply happen upon it, we need the eyes of our hearts to recognize that thing that is worth trading everything we have for, the thing that will bring unspeakable joy.*

*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. Now I know it's tempting to leap to the judgment we think we hear here, but let's not start with that. Nobody wants to be thrown in the furnace so I will remind you that love is who God is and love is what God does. We are not the ones to do the sorting and that isn't what we need to concern ourselves with here. Jesus is telling us about the kingdom of heaven! He doesn't say it's the place where the bad people burn in hell. He says it's like a net. A net that*

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<sup>1</sup> ten Boom, Corrie; [The Hiding Place](#); Bantam Books, 1984

was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind. It likely caught everything else too – seaweed, Peter’s old boot that went overboard, flotsam and jetsam of every kind. It’s the net we’re to pay attention to here, because the Kingdom of Heaven is where everything, absolutely everything gets scooped up and brought in.

Have you understood all this?

Unlike the disciples, I don’t think I could answer “yes.” While it’s true Jesus uses the ordinary things of our lives to help us understand – and they do help us understand – all these parables speak to me of a Kingdom that is unexpected, and maybe even subversive. A kingdom that is always at hand, found in the ordinary places of our lives and yet somehow something we must diligently search for. A kingdom whose hiddenness speaks of the mystery of God and the treasure that is worth our whole lives. Nope. I would not say I understand all of that. But I do believe it. And that actually feels more important to me.

I think this is one of the many reasons Jesus taught in parables. In parables, Jesus doesn’t give straight up answers and he doesn’t give us a lot of facts. Parables don’t deal in facts, they deal in imagination and experience. That’s the way Jesus draws us in, you know – he tells the stories of our lives through an ordinary woman baking bread, through ordinary fishermen catching fish, even ordinary schemers who will cheat people out of treasure. And somehow he sanctifies it all, showing us the holiness of our own lives.

Jesus’ parables invite us into a deeper faith that is grounded in our experiences of God, our experiences of love, our experiences of trust. Parables invite us to deepen our faith not by knowing more about God, but by coming to know God. Parables invite us deeper into God’s story by inviting us deeper into our relationship with God. You see, God has planted the seeds of heaven in each one of our hearts. Sometimes they feel hidden, and sometimes they grow so quickly it takes our breath away.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a seed, like yeast, like a treasure, like a pearl, like a net teeming with fish of every kind, like a seed planted in your heart, which when allowed to grow becomes the treasure worth giving your life for. Amen.