

Today in the gospel Jesus speaks to us about the kingdom of heaven. Earlier in the gospel of Matthew he tells us that we are to seek this kingdom. This is our main aim in life, to seek the kingdom of heaven more than anything else. What should follow from here is a step by step account from Jesus on how we as his disciples go about seeking his kingdom. We need instructions, directions on what to do; how to get there. Instead Jesus speaks to us in parables that may give us more questions than answers.

Where is the kingdom of heaven? Is it somewhere up there?
Is it where we go when we die? Is it where we are reunited with all of our loved ones? What is it like in the kingdom of heaven?
Is everything perfect there? Is this the kingdom that is spoken about in Revelation where there is no more crying or tears?
If the kingdom of heaven is in heaven then how do we seek it now?
What do we do between now and then?

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 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 a nest in its branches.

You know what a mustard plant really is, don't you? It is a weed. I read about a guy who planted it in a corner of his flower bed. It not only grew there but it took over his entire flower bed. Then it moved out and took over the grass in his back yard and even came up between the cracks in his sidewalk. Then it took off and crossed over into his neighbor's yard. There's no stopping it once it gets started. The kingdom of God is like that when it gets turned loose. None of us can control it.

The kingdom of God is like kudzu that in the summer sun can grow 10 to 12 inches a day. It grows and grows and grows with reckless abandon covering trees, the ground, telephone poles, even houses in its path.

The kingdom of God is like a person who works on a golf course and goes out in the middle of a fairway and plants a dandelion. The dandelion grows and produces a little yellow flower and then it produces the ball of seeds that get blown in the wind and create more dandelion plants on the fairway. And before long the whole fairway, the whole golf course is covered in dandelions.

The kingdom of God is like chocolate syrup that is poured into a glass of pristine white milk. Once the spoon is inserted in the glass and begins to stir, there is no more white milk. It gradually changes into rich, brown, chocolate milk.

So what do you need to know about this kingdom of heaven beyond the facts that God will make it spread and that it will take over everything? You need to know who is king, what the kingdom is and what part you play in it.

Jesus is king of the kingdom of heaven. He established his rule when he defeated sin, death, and the devil by dying on a cross and then rising 3 days later. Jesus' death and resurrection is the very center point of time. What Jesus did by dying on the cross and then rising from the grave changed everything. It traveled back in time and gave people like Abraham and Sarah, Jacob, Isaac, Rachel, and Rebekah entrance into the kingdom of God. All the faithful who lived on this earth before Jesus came in human form were redeemed and pulled from the yawning gates of hell by Jesus himself when he died and then returned to life again.

And then Jesus' death and resurrection forever changed the world for all those who would come after him. No longer did they and the rest of us have to live as slaves to sin. We were made free by his sacrificing of his life and by the fact that Jesus now is

the true ruler of heaven and earth. All people, all powers,
angels and demons, now have to answer to him,
because they now are on his turf.

So from the moment he rose from the cross to this very day,
Jesus is about the work of taking over this entire world
and turning it into his kingdom. He is claiming this world as his own
for he is its true ruler. And at the end of time every knee shall indeed
bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, the ruler of all.
What was messed up in the beginning with Adam and Eve
and sin entering the world will be completely rectified.
All of creation will once again be in communion,
complete relationship with God and all will be well.

Our role is to be spreaders of the kingdom. Jesus Christ lives in us.
Jesus Christ continues his work through us.
Everywhere we go. Everyone we talk to. Every interaction
we have with another human being is a chance for the kingdom
of heaven to be seen and experienced and spread.
Jesus loves you. He loves every person you interact with
in the course of a day. You are a dandelion that the Spirit of God
blows upon and then scatters your seeds in the wind.
Jesus wants to spread his love and his truth through you.

One other thing you should know about mustard plants and their seeds.
In Jesus' day, mustard was well known for its medicinal properties.
According to the historian, Pliny, it was used with vinegar
to treat serpent bites and scorpion stings, and the poisons of fungi.
It was also used for toothaches and all stomach troubles.
So as mustard spread and took over the land before it with it,
it brought the potential for healing. So it is with us,
as Christians, as we spread throughout the world,
we carry with us the presence of Christ.
Christ himself is about the work of healing the ills of our world
and bringing in his kingdom of peace.

Beyond being spreaders of the kingdom itself by how we live and act and love others, we are supposed to be searching for this ourselves with all our hearts. Have you ever been obsessed with something? Have you ever had a crush on someone in school to the point that you doodled his or her name in the margins of your paper all day when you should have been taking notes? Or have you been obsessed with being the best player on your team, the best student in the class, the employee who would climb the ladder the fastest?

Well, our Lord says that with that same tenacity and determination you should seek to be with him. You should give all your effort, all your time to knowing him better. Jesus says you should be obsessed with him and with his kingdom. It should be like a treasure that once you discover it, you go and sell everything you have so that you can possess it. It is like the finest of pearls that once you have found it, you are willing to give anything, everything to have it as your own.

What are you obsessed with more than Jesus? What has your eye, takes up your time, fills your thoughts more than knowing & loving and serving your Lord? Is it family? Is it your career? Is it seeking your own leisure and pleasure? Is it worries about money and financial future? Is it visions of glory and self-gratification?

The kingdom of heaven is like a high schooler and three of his friends who dropped everything, probably even playing their WI gaming system, to help Paul Phillips deliver a washer and dryer to Amber and Jamison Hughes and their triplets this past week.

The kingdom of heaven is like this parade of people I saw going by my door one evening this past week. They were all headed to a Christian education meeting to decide what curriculum we would use in Sunday school

for our children this fall. These people had researched and studied loads of different programs available and put their heads together to decide what curriculum would be best at helping our children learn who Jesus is and how much he loves them.

The kingdom of heaven is like 10 of our middle schoolers who will be taking part in the Urban plunge mission this coming week. As they work at North Raleigh Ministries and on site at Pan Lutheran Ministries -Families Together, they will be Christ to those whom they meet. The kingdom of heaven will be right there with them this coming week.

Every time we act in the name of Christ and share his love another dandelion pops up on the golf course, the kudzu spreads out a couple more feet, the chocolate milk gets even darker and sweeter to the taste. May we spread the love of Jesus. May we find joy and delight and obsession in doing so. And may Jesus, even through the likes of us, bring in his kingdom until all the world is embraced by the loving arms of Jesus our Lord.