

## Bishop Jonathan's Sermon – Trinity 7

Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Earlier this year, I decided to have a go at baking bread. In fact, I was going to go on a bread-making course as a birthday present – but that didn't happen because of the lockdown. Nevertheless, I persisted and started using a very simple recipe which we found in a National Trust magazine. Two kinds of flour, warm water, a pinch of salt and sugar, an ounce of butter. And there's something else that I have forgotten – the yeast of course!

In fact, in one of my early attempts I did forget the yeast, though fortunately I remembered just in time, when I was about to leave the dough to rise for the first time. Thankfully, I got away with it, and was able to work the yeast into the dough at the last minute. Because without the yeast, it would of course have been a complete disaster – as flat as a pancake and as solid as a rock!

And yeast, as we have heard, is one of the things that Jesus talks about in our gospel reading from Matthew 13: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." I have learned two things about the process of getting the yeast to do its work. First, you have to make sure it is worked right into the dough, and second, you have to give it time to rise.

This is the one of the pictures that Jesus uses to describe the Kingdom of Heaven. It is like yeast, being worked into the dough, until the bread rises and is ready for the oven. Now, if you're not careful you can try to read too much into a parable, in which there is usually just one key message. But taken together with what Jesus says about the mustard seed starting small and eventually growing into a big tree, this is really about *patience*. It is about sowing seeds, about working the dough into the yeast – and then waiting patiently for things to happen. Rome wasn't built in a day, and the kingdom of heaven doesn't come in an instant. We need to do the work God has given us to do – like working the yeast into the dough – and then we need to wait and see what comes. That's the first thing then: *Be patient about what God is doing*.

The second theme about the kingdom of heaven in this passage has a rather different feel to it. Jesus talks about treasure hidden in a field or a pearl of great value. In this case, the story is about keeping our eye on the prize. About being focused on the ultimate goal, rather than being distracted by what's going on around us or deterred by problems along the way. With all that's going on at the moment with the Coronavirus, or indeed all the stuff we have to cope with in our ordinary lives, it is easy to lose sight of the one thing that Jesus wants us to keep in view. In the words of the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew Chapter 6: "Seek first the kingdom of heaven, and everything else will be given to you as well." And that gives us the second thing we need to hear from this passage: *Stay focused on what God has given you to do*.

Finally, we come to the third theme in the passage, which comes from this strange little story about fishing nets and keeping the good and throwing away the bad fish that are

caught. And that is really about the same theme as last week's gospel reading – namely, that we need to leave it to God to sort out the good and the bad at the end of the day. It's a little confusing that the passage we read today has actually been taken out of the middle of the passage that we read last week, so that what we read here really belongs together with what Jesus said about harvesting the wheat and the tares. *It's for God to sort out what's good and what's bad, at the end of the day – not for us.*

So what does all this mean for us today, in the midst of the Coronavirus crisis and as we just tentatively begin to look to the future after the lockdown?

Well, as we have seen, the first thing is to do with patience. It's hard at the moment to see what God is doing – we are going to have to wait and see. So we need to get on and do our job – sowing the mustard seed, working the yeast into the dough. It's not exciting, it's about being faithful and keeping faith, knowing that God is at work and that one day we will see the results. Like a freshly baked loaf coming out of the oven.

The second thing follows from that. We need to keep our eyes on the prize – to stay focused on seeking the kingdom of God and not being distracted by worries or wealth or the cares of the world. God is at work and we need to carry on working with him – so that he can use what we offer to help build his kingdom here on earth.

And thirdly we need to leave up to God what he makes of the things that we and others may do. It is not our job to judge what our fellow Christians are doing for the sake of God's kingdom. That is between them and God. Our job is to get on with the work God has given us to do, bringing in the harvest in the field to which he has assigned us. The rest is up to him.

As we go through this time of uncertainty and change, we are going to face many challenges. Not everything we used to do as churches will be able to carry on, and some new things that we have learned will have to take their place.

What matters is what we have learned and the way in which we respond to what God is bringing:

- Be patient – God is at work, even when we can't see it
- Stay focused – on seeking God's kingdom of righteousness and peace
- Get on with what God has given us to do – and leave the rest up to him

Amen.