

Matthew 13: 31-33 and 44-52

Over the last couple of weeks we have thought a lot about seeds, Lynda talked to us about seeds being sown in different soils and bringing forth different amounts of wheat, then last week we heard from Alison about weeds being planted alongside the good wheat, and this week we have a tiny seed producing a big tree. This week's reading also provides us with some very short 'short stories' about the yeast that mixes with the flour produced by that wheat, an unusual find in a field, and a beautiful pearl. Jesus tells us that all these tell us something about his kingdom.

Which poses the question what is God's kingdom?

We live in a kingdom, though its probably not something we think about very much but there are little things that remind us that the this country acknowledges a power higher than that held by the person who lives at 10 Downing Street, our coins, banknotes and stamps bear the image of our monarch, the E II R logo appears on our post boxes and in the church our bishops are appointed by the Queen. Lots of little reminders that we are part of a kingdom. Our readings this week are a bit like that, reminders that we are part of God's kingdom, pointers to how we can see the kingdom in the world around us.

The kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God as its described in some places, isn't quite like the United Kingdom, it doesn't have a physical location. Perhaps its more helpful to think of it as being where God is king rather than being a place. Frederick Buechner suggests that where "God's kingly will is being done in various odd ways among us even at this moment, the kingdom has come already."

Let's have another look at those images that were in our bible reading and see what they tell us about God's kingdom.

Jesus describes the kingdom as being like a mustard seed which is tiny but grows into something that birds can rest in. **mustard tree image** The mustard we are familiar with here doesn't grow into anything that birds could perch in, but there is a middle eastern version which will grow into the big shrub we can see here.

In a shrub like this there is plenty of space for birds to perch, but Jesus tells us he is talking about his kingdom and from a tiny start, a local preacher in the middle east two thousand years ago, something large has developed, a world wide church that is large enough to provide space for everyone to come and find rest.

Yeast image Then we are told that the kingdom is like yeast that works its way through flour to make the bread rise. The yeast becomes part of the dough and it rises, changing shape and texture and becoming something tasty and nutritious. The yeast does its work unseen, and unaided by the baker. How is this like the kingdom? As people we might start things off but it is God who does the real work without any 'assistance' from us, and what he can produce is bigger than we imagine and better for us.

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Both the yeast and the mustard seed, do their work in secret and in their own time, the yeast is mixed into the flour and can't be distinguished from it while it is working, the seed is buried in the good soil while it germinates and begins to grow. Last week we heard about God's judgement and the need to wait until harvest to separate the wheat and the tares, in the same way the yeast and the mustard seed work in their own time – its no good trying to rush the rising of a loaf of bread or the germination of a seed.

The next two stories also require some waiting but this time in the waiting there is action, **treasure image** the person who finds a field with a treasure in it hides the treasure, goes and buys the field and only then can retrieve the treasure – in the days before banks hiding your treasure in this way wasn't as odd as it sounds to us now **pearl image** and the merchant who finds the pearl of great price goes to sell everything he has so he can own this perfect pearl.

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What do these tell us about the kingdom? Sometimes we don't just start things and leave them, sometimes we need to do something to enable us to be part of what's happening that might be something relatively ordinary like a farmer buying a field or letting go of other things that mattered to us in order to get to the right thing, the merchant sells everything to own the pearl,

How can we recognise God's kingdom and promote it?

Recognising God's kingdom might be about looking at apparently ordinary things in an extraordinary way. Elizabeth Barrett Browning said "Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God, But only he who sees takes off his shoes; The rest sit round and pluck blackberries." We need to be able to recognise heaven, God's kingdom, and then we can start to make it more visible to those around us.

In the Lord's prayer we say "thy kingdom come, thy will be done" - if we start doing God's will at every opportunity we will see his kingdom more and more. Just like the mustard seed or the yeast, what we do to help make God's kingdom known may be to start something in a small way. The story you tell, or the activity you help a child with might mature over time and bring them back to God as an adult, your smile and listening ear for an older person might give them the encouragement to share their wisdom with you and realise they still have value, showing care and support for people who are not our immediate friends and family can make them feel loved and cared for – baking bread and planting seeds are everyday activities and it is in these that Jesus says the kingdom can be seen. For some of us, there might be a time when God calls us to something more out of the ordinary – in recent months many parents have found themselves becoming teachers in a way they didn't expect, we might find ourselves in a place where we step into a new role at church or at home or at work but if we approach it right, we will find as Buechner says that where "God's kingly will is being done in various odd ways among us even at this moment, the kingdom has come already."