

May I speak in the name of God, who has made us for his delight, who has saved us by his son, and who encourages us with his Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus is so often saying to us, especially here in Matthew's gospel, the kingdom of heaven is like this, or like that, so this morning I want to enable us to think about that gospel reading in the context of that question: what is the kingdom of heaven like, in our context? And most particularly what is God showing us about his kingdom in these times.

Talking to people about their extraordinarily different experiences, of the last four months, it's clear that for lots of us there have been some common threads, and especially around looking, and hearing; around seeing, and listening.

The sky was, for a time, wonderfully clear; extraordinarily blue on beautiful days. The air was remarkably clean, even in cities. The birds could be heard with no traffic.

Amidst all the tragedy, and horror, and trauma, of this terrible virus, there were gifts: gifts of seeing; gifts of hearing; and they were gifts, too, of the revelation of community, and friendship; of a deep connectedness which not all of us had suspected was there.

So here in these parables Jesus puts before us some intriguing examples of what the kingdom of heaven is like. The kingdom of heaven, he says to us, is like a mustard seed: a tiny thing, something of no account, which miraculously, by the force of nature and creation, becomes something majestic, magnificent, a great tree, where the birds of the air can make their homes.

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast mixed with a certain measure of flour, so already we see the kingdom of heaven in these small revelations I've just been indicating. A time when we suddenly notice the natural world again.

Perhaps because we had the time; perhaps because we had the silence; and in the case of the yeast, when for many people - I was not, I have to confess, among them - sourdough bread became a sort of private obsession, which then leached onto the internet with many, many short films about its making, and examples of either success, or less so, and if you've ever tried sourdough, and been unsuccessful, it's quite a good candidate for building houses with!

But here are the things I specially want us to attend to this morning. You could write a whole book about this list of parables; the net, which reminds us about judgment, something we're less comfortable talking about. The master of the household points the way for us to these two sayings I want us to think about.

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which someone found and hid and then, in his great 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. And at the end of these parables Jesus says to his disciples, have you understood all this? And they say confidently and happily, yes. And I think, good luck to you! Because for us understanding these parables

is the work of a lifetime. Each one of them has such depth of meaning; such intensity; such content; so much to teach us.

But the treasure in the field, and the pearl of great price, what do they say to us about God's kingdom? About what God might be showing us about his kingdom, in our present circumstances.

What really matters to you? Where is your treasure? Where is your bright field, or your pearl?

The master of the household brings out of his treasure things both new and old, Jesus says at the end of this little excerpt. So what will we keep from these strange times? What will turn out to be a thing that was really important that we didn't know about before?

Perhaps it's that understanding of community, or those insights about the natural world? Perhaps it's a new understanding of inequality in our society, and the way it damages everyone.

What will we keep from what we've seen and heard and understood in these strange times? And what will we come to see was unique to them. Important for a moment, but not something to endure. The treasure that we bring out of this household, new and old. And what treasure did we have, perhaps unrecognised: always there, but never before now understood to be something that really mattered.

And what were the things that we thought were treasure but which we actually see now were not really important at all.

For each of us, there is in these little sayings, so much to think about. But here is a question for this morning: what is God showing us about his kingdom in our present circumstances? What is he showing you and me, about what really matters, about treasure, and the pearl, and the things of eternity, and of his kingdom, when the world and all eternity will be ordered in accordance with God's loving purposes.

I want to finish with a poem by R.S. Thomas, which some of you will know. It's called 'The Bright Field'.

I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness

that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity which awaits you.

Amen.