

Sermon for 30.7.17

Over the past weeks we have heard parables from chapter 13 of Matthew's gospel about the kingdom of heaven.

The parables are centered on Jesus Christ and the kingdom which he inaugurates.

The parables are evocative, in the sense that when we hear them, we are invited to see where we stand in relation to Jesus and the kingdom that he brings.

One commentary I read, suggests that the reason the gospel writer gathers the parables together into this one chapter is to provide a powerful pictorial climax to the first half of his Gospel, for chapter 13 is the hinge on which the whole of Matthew's gospel turns. We notice that at the end of today's reading when Jesus is rejected by the people in his home town, he leaves all this behind him and sets forth from Galilee towards Jerusalem and his death.

But before we head off with Jesus to Jerusalem, we have the last three parables in the series about the kingdom to consider.

The parable about the dragnet is similar to the wheat and weeds – there are people of all types in the kingdom as there are fish in the net – and the judgement will sort out the mixture at the end time.

The parable challenges the hearers about their perseverance until the last day. Matthew's gospel never promotes any idea of instant salvation. There are no shortcuts. Perseverance to the end is Key to our freedom or salvation in Matthew's gospel.

The parables about the pearl of great price and the treasure in the field are my favorites, especially the treasure in the fields as I wrote in the pew sheet. Both are short, and stress the priceless value of the kingdom: it is worth any sacrifice. Some come upon it by accident, some after a long and patient search. Both stress that when it is found, the finder will give all to keep it.

So how do we imagine the mystery of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus inaugurates?

From the gospels we know that it is not of this world, that it is at hand, that it is among us and that it is within us. We know that it is filled with a mixture of people, that it produces fertile growth and that it can be compared to the smallest of seeds that can grow into the largest of trees.

In her book "Wisdom Jesus" contemporary theologian Cynthia Bourgeault, quotes fellow theologian Jim Marion who suggests that the kingdom of heaven is a state of "unitive consciousness, – that it is not a place you go to, but a place that you come from."¹ That it is a whole new way of looking at people, and the world, through a transformed awareness that sees the indwelling oneness of God in all creation.

¹ Cynthia Bourgeault, *Wisdom Jesus*, Shambhala, London: 2008, p30.

Such a claim brings to mind Jesus words of mutual indwelling – *I am in you and you are in me, abide in my love. I am the vine and you are the branches – abide in my love.*

Some see the kingdom from a wisdom perspective. For Solomon in the Old Testament reading, wisdom is the pearl of great price that he seeks and God praises him and grants him a wise and discerning mind.

In John's gospel chapter 14, we read about the Father's mansion that has many rooms and that we will be taken there by Jesus. This passage is often read at funerals and it provides those who grieve an image of a very personal sense of belonging in a heavenly home.

For me the kingdom of heaven is the personal journey of life in Christ. It is not only a new consciousness in which wisdom prevails, but it is the way into such consciousness.

It is the recognition and the sorting of the mixture of trueness and falseness within, in the power of the Spirit.

It is the journey into the mystery of God's steadfast love for us revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ.

It is journeying to the end in all we do and suffer, here and now, in the assurance that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, as Paul writes in the epistle.

During this coming week I encourage us all to prayerfully reflect on what our vision is of the kingdom of heaven.

Now many of us may not be used to this type of prayerful reflection and it may be a little daunting to enter into – but please be reassured by Paul's words in the epistle that God knows the intentions of the heart and that it is the very Spirit who intercedes for us according to the will of God.

I am a poor substitute for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, but I too am also available if and when you need to talk about your vision of the kingdom.

The Lord be with you.