

Call to Worship

A tiny seed planted can grow to a mighty tree.
In small numbers we worship today,
but as part of a mighty Church worldwide.
A tiny bit of yeast can make the loaf rise.
Tempted to feel small and alone,
we rise to worship, part of a greater whole.
Wondering at the worth
of our presence and praise at home,
we worship today offering what combined treasures we have.

Prayer

God of the universe,
we thank you that you meet us here, in this corner of the world.

We thank you that we matter to you,
that we have a place in your divine economy. And so we dare to offer you our praises.

You grace our gatherings, large or small,
with the beauty of your presence, embracing our clumsy attempts to honour you, Lord of
all.

We thank you that you look on us with love and lift our humanity, and that you look on the
ways we fail you and one another
in grace and forgiveness.

God, as those who know ourselves forgiven, loved and called to serve, may we affirm one
another,
building each other up to seek to serve you, great God of all.

And so, may our worship here
enable us to fix our eyes on you, equipping us for your mission
in our neighbourhood and throughout the world, in Jesus' name.
as we pray together the words he taught us ...Lord's Prayer

Following on to an article she read in the Guardian, my amazingly creative writer friend
Vicky Allen, one of the leaders of Discovery Church in Dunbar has embarked on a writing
project called This Time Next Summer and invited people to consider the times we are living
through and respond to our future self about what we hope we have learned... The
invitation says, If you were going to write a letter to your future self, to read this time next
summer, what would you like to tell yourself about your experience of this year? What
would you want to remember? To forget? What have you learned? What are you hoping
next summer will bring?

This page is there for us to bring together our creative responses to that question. You can
write a letter, make a short film, create a piece of art, write a poem...Send them in and we
will create our own little time capsule and hopefully be able to revisit these in some form
next summer.

You can even get postcards on the High Street to help you do the same.

The question of where we will be in 12 weeks is hard enough, never mind 12 months, in some ways, it is a bit like the question a dear family friend asked about what heaven is like. Here answer like mine, was that we can't know for sure because no one has been there and come back except Jesus. What will it be like – this place prepared for us? Jesus says a lot about the kingdom of heaven in today's reading, and these ordinary symbols are but some of the ways we can begin to overcome our present fears and tribulations and dream of a new earth complete with the treasures of heaven.

Romans 8:26-39

⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who^[j] have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

More Than Conquerors

³¹What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”^[i]

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[k] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast

³¹He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field.³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows,

it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

³³ He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds^[b] of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

The Parable of the Net

⁴⁷ “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked.

“Yes,” they replied.

⁵² He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

The Kingdom Of Heaven Is Like...

As we work our way through Matthew’s gospel, we come to the third main chunk of teaching from Jesus.

This section is comprised primarily of lots of parables:

a buffet of all-you-can eat rural imagery from which to feast our souls.

These images are so familiar to those of us who have grown up in the church that we may not grasp just how much they are located within a rural agricultural peasant culture to whom they would speak of the daily routine and of the people they would meet in market places and trading towns as they went to sell their wares.

While these parables still speak directly to many people around the world in developing nations, they are far removed from many in the developed nations.

Which raises for us the inevitable question:
what are the parables that we would use today
to describe the Kingdom of Heaven?
Therefore, I would like to challenge each of you
Joining in online or reading on the printed copy
to come up with their own parables and images.
The point of a parable, of course,
is not to provide easy answers.
The purpose is to engage our imaginations in exploring
how a metaphor might expand our understanding
and raise further questions and discussion
about the nature of the subject of the parable.
These parables, which on the surface
seem to be so straightforward, are not exceptions.
They are invitations to ponder
and think about what Jesus is describing.
No parable or metaphor can fully encapsulate its subject.
However, they can each reveal something of a facet
of the whole jewel.
It can be overwhelming to be faced
with a barrage of different parables
as in this section of Matthew's gospel, but if we picture
each of them as describing different facets of the jewel,
it might help us to keep some perspective of the whole.
As has been pointed out in previous weeks,
throughout Matthew's account of Jesus' life is
an undercurrent of division and the conflict that Jesus' life,
ministry, and teaching stirs within the community
as it comes into direct contact with the powerful of his time and
the overall rule of Rome in the region.
We have a direct contrast between the kingdom of Rome and the
Kingdom of Heaven, and the juxtaposition of the Roman Emperor
with God's rule of his empire of the heavens.
These parables help to explore with their listeners
why so many people do not "get it", why they refuse
to enter into God's reign as revealed by Jesus,
and the place of human sinfulness
and the role of the Deceiver in leading people
away from the Kingdom of God.
Up to this point in Jesus' ministry much of the revelation

of the Kingdom of Heaven has been localised and focused
on the transformation of individual lives.
Welcome as that was for those concerned and
those who understood the importance of what was happening,
these actions could be relatively easily dismissed by the Pharisees
and others intent on undermining this challenge

to their own position.

The parables collected here move beyond that relatively parochial beginning and start to explore the massive implications of what Jesus has been revealing

and the cosmic scale of what he was doing.

They open our imaginations to see the Kingdom of Heaven beyond ourselves, beyond our current circumstances, as a place where the smallest changes can make a big difference, where buried treasures are uncovered and where good conquers evil.

and paint a picture of what the kingdom of heaven might be like that we can come back to again and again.

Prayer

God, in every time and season,
you are teaching us more about ourselves and about you.
May we always be open
to discovering new ways of seeing,
and new ways of serving you, God of all the ages.
May we know that nothing is hidden from you,
and that nothing is foreign.
You know and embrace the ordinary times
and the extraordinary times.
And what is more,
you lead us through whatever we face.
God, in the midst of chaos and fear,
may we see you quietly at work
and calling us to follow.
May we lighten one another's burden
however we can:
by connecting, by listening,
by being the neighbours you invite us to be.
May we bear one another's burdens
and share one another's grief.
And, in time, may we rejoice together in your love.
Lord, we may not know the way ahead,
but we do know that you are with us and will never leave us.
May that assurance help us to face all that we must face,
and strengthen us to continue to step out in faith,
holding the Christ light for one another,
knowing that you are with us
and you go before us always.
Amen.

Share the Grace Together