

The parables assigned for the last 2 weeks consisted of moderate length narratives followed a few verses later by an explanation or interpretation. They each focused on ground, seeds, soil or sowing. To the contrary, this week we have five **short** parables. They are all very brief, and only one has the mention of a seed, and finally, and maybe most importantly, none have any explicit interpretation. We are, therefore, left as readers to make our own sense of the meanings of these five parables relative to the kingdom of heaven.

The first two parables, the mustard seed and the yeast, use elements at the start that are relatively insignificant or small yet **yield** much greater results in the end. Then the third and fourth parables shift the theme from size to **value**. The fifth parable is in a class all its own by introducing the concept of plenty tied to the concept of sorting. The first four parables invite us to answer two questions: what do they describe about the kingdom of heaven and who plays what roles in each story?

For instance, relative to the first two parables, why does Jesus compare the kingdom of heaven to both a pernicious weed and a pollutant? David Lose says that it is because both mustard seed and yeast have a way of spreading beyond anything one can imagine, infiltrating a system, and then **taking** over the host. The second two parables then focus on the delight, joy, surprise, and value we discover as the kingdom comes near to us.

Parables and stories often tend to cause us to try to define who are the players in the parables and what player most **closely** aligns with ourselves. In our last two parables from the last two weeks we were faced with determining who were the sowers, who were the seeds, and who were the different types of ground. These decisions are similar to the decisions we have to make when considering the parable of the prodigal son or prodigal father from Luke Fifteen. And even our five short parables today challenge us to place ourselves and others within these stories.

Chad Bird suggests that we are the treasure and the pearl in the third and fourth parables today and God is the one seeking us. This is a marvelous thought that reinforces that our salvation is entirely the act of God and not our action. God comes to us, we do not come to God. The question is do we answer and how do we answer? Or do we hide like Adam and Eve in the garden.

Chad Bird also says “When you’re drowning, Jesus is not a coach who stands on the shoreline shouting swimming instructions. Jesus is the Savior who never leaves your side, who holds your head above water, who swims you to shore. Jesus doesn’t tell you what to do; Jesus says, “It is done. It is finished.””

The key point in our gospel reading today may simply be as David Lose suggests – that God’s kingdom is far more potent than we can **imagine** and spreads to every corner of our lives. Now, what do you think, is that good news or is that bad news?

For the record, I think it is good news. I also think that is how it ties to our second reading from Romans eight. Romans eight has two key thoughts for me the second of which is repeated several times, but let us look first at the **initial** thought.

We are hit with the initial thought immediately in the first verse of our reading today. It says: “**The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.**” That my friends tells me that God is acting on our behalf just like the verse from Mark that I often quote that says: “**Lord I believe, help my unbelief.**” It also tells me that God is **indeed** in every corner of our **being**. You know, like mustard seed or yeast.

The second thought is succinctly said in the last half of verse 31 that says: “**If God is for us, who is against us?**” This thought is renewed several times in the remaining verses of our reading but most notably and most strongly in verses 38 and 39 which I do often quote as well. They say: “**For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**” Sometimes I think Paul left something important off this list, ourselves. That thought my friends is, however, a huge theological discussion that I am not prepared to enter into now, today.

Hear then the good news:

How does one depict the kingdom of heaven?

The promise of the parables about the kingdom of heaven is that even when the kingdom is not **seen**, **it is near**.

God’s kingdom **will** prevail.

Some say we are in a war and that may be true.

But in the face of war, **we should** claim God’s peace.

The victory is assured not only through the one who loved us, but through the very love of God itself.

This is the story of God’s love.

It is the story into which we are written as daughters and sons of God.

Believe it.

Trust it.

Amen