

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Today is about kingdom. Today is about how we interact with kingdom, how kingdom interacts with us. And, these (many) descriptions, parables about the kingdom are not the same. There are similarities. It makes sense why they are grouped together by Matthew (and the editors of the Revised Common Lectionary) because they share a similar subject and some even sound much like the one that precedes it, but these parables, these descriptions of kingdom are not the same. So, when Christ asks the disciples, "Have you understood?" and they answer, "Yes." I don't believe it. I mean, really?! You really understood all of this, you understood these stream of parables thrown at you? I mean, I know Peter certainly didn't get it, so really Matthew, you want us to believe the disciples simply said, "yup, we got you Jesus, no problem."? Nice try.

What I wish the disciples had said was, "we're certainly trying to." Because, that's what I think we all strive to accomplish in our faith, certainly trying to understand what is before us, understand what is asked of us, understand what we are to do with our faith. And, we can try to understand what Jesus is saying here, in fact I think we have to try and understand because that is how we build our faith. We wrestle with passages each week, we especially wrestle with the direction the gospels take us in this season after Pentecost. There is no culminating event in this season (except for the apocalyptic literature we get at the end), there is no Christmas, Lent is not right around the corner, and Easter has just passed. And yet, we are presented with gospel lessons each week, sometimes somewhat interestingly edited (you'll notice we're missing 11 verses from the middle of today's gospel passage), presented so that we may know the whole picture of Jesus' life and

ministry. Presented so that over the course of three years, we hear from each of the gospel accounts, we are reminded of the important stories and events, and are exposed to those unique events that only pop up in one gospel. So, let's try together today to understand these various expressions of kingdom.

A mustard seed, I know this one!

Oh wait, wrong mustard seed parable.

In this mustard seed parable (not the one about the "size" of our faith), we hear that the smallest of all the seeds grows into a great tree. And, did you know, that's not hyperbole. Like many of you, I've seen mustard seeds. Like many of you, I had not actually seen a mustard tree until I googled it this week. They're huge! Go on and google it for yourself right now if you want, I'll allow the multitasking. What then, does this parable mean for us? How does the smallest seed, growing into a great tree, providing a place for the birds to nest, make our understanding of kingdom, of faith any clearer?

[Ok, you should be done googling now]

For me, today, this parable of the kingdom speaks to me about how we grow our very faith, through formation. Formation experienced as learning, formation experienced as worship, formation experienced as camp romances, formation experienced as a kid coloring in the pews. Formation, our education and learning of our faith, starts at the very beginning, as a seed. It is only through the growth of that seed into a great tree, a tree that can offer support to others, that kingdom is realized. And, we have the responsibility to insure that seeds can grow in this place. Formation is not just for children, although they are perhaps at the best place in life to learn and grow. We have to provide formation for all

who come to this place. We have to invest in growing the seeds in our youngest members. We have to commit to growing those seeds, and nurturing the bushes, of those who wonder and wander in their young adult lives. We have to grow the seeds and care for the trees as they question and probe their faith through the maturity and experience of life.

And the kingdom continues to come alive through our commitment to forming all who come in through these doors.

Kingdom as yeast comes to us to remind us that it doesn't happen without work. You can't have yeast and have flour, and not combine the two if you want it leavened, if you want to create something more than the two parts by themselves. And that is how our faith must be understood. It is not simple enough to take in one part of this experience and call it good, you must put in the work of combining the different aspects of our experience here together, our worship, the music, education, opportunities for children and youth, opportunities to serve, to create something new, something active, something that creates kingdom in this place.

And in doing this work, we experience the joy that is finding the kingdom, finding the buried treasure in your very own field, finding the one pearl and making it yours, no cost too high, no barrier too large. When we find kingdom, we have to put our all into holding onto that, into owning that, into making it ours. If you find kingdom in this place, then you need to put everything you have into making sure that kingdom stays in this place. That means serving through volunteering, through serving in worship as a reader, a prayer, in the choir, at the altar rail, as an acolyte or a vergers. You hold onto kingdom in this place by making sure that kingdom can be found in this place. By sharing the fact that

kingdom is here with any and all you encounter. By instilling in those who seek, that kingdom can be found here, that as their seed grows, they too will know and recognize the kingdom that is present.

And, kingdom is about doing the work of fishing. In a clever turn of phrase, Jesus marks the very first disciples he calls as fishers of men. And so we too must cast our nets. We have to spread out the Good News of Christ. We have to attract fish into our nets through the example of our words and actions, through the presence of kingdom shining bright from this place. And, part of kingdom is organization. Not everyone that comes to this place will find kingdom here. Not everyone that is currently in this place is finding kingdom here. And that's ok. It is our job to help those who are not finding kingdom to understand why. Perhaps, they simply are looking for a different expression of the kingdom than the one we offer, and that is totally a legit and noble thing to admit. Perhaps, you are too focused in on the work you see before you in this place, that you forget to look up and see that there is kingdom making happening all over this place that you didn't realize, by many in this place who you don't know, and perhaps it is time that you too start to create kingdom, by growing in faith and knowledge and trust in the experience of faith that is found in this place, so much so that your joy of being in this place is so great that you cannot help but throw out nets to bring more people in.

And sometimes, angels will come and separate out the evil. Evil, real evil, is thankfully not often seen. But that doesn't mean that we don't all experience little pieces of evil that need to be separated out, to be thrown into the furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Little pieces like pride, like a refusal to change, like a lack of

faith in trusting in the Holy Spirit to be with us, always, even in times such as these. Little pieces like anger, like fear, like the hunger for power and control. It is these little pieces that need to be sorted out. It is these little pieces that the angels come to throw into the furnace of fire, if we are willing to acknowledge them, if we are willing to take part in the throwing out.

How do we know we are the righteous, that our pieces are righteous? We know through the celebration and act of educating ourselves and others, through experiencing the power of formation through worship, through relationships, through Children's Church and Adult Forum hour. We know we are the righteous through the work that we put in to create more, to create kingdom through our active role in doing the work. We know we are the righteous through the joy we express in our faith, through the joy we have in discovering and rediscovering this kingdom that is being created here.

Kingdom is our goal. Kingdom experienced here, now, means that we are doing the work of God, living into the model of ministry left for us by Christ, living and sharing the Good News that we find through building our faith through formation, through doing the work of our faith in this place and out in the world, through expressing our joy in that faith to all, and bringing others into that experience of faith by casting our nets out far and wide. Kingdom is the goal, and kingdom is achievable, if we simply understand, or at least try to.

Amen.