

Gospel reflections
Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

The first gospel reflection for the year was based on a Matthew reading and the beginning of Jesus' ministry where he explores how the kingdom of God is so very different to what we expect. I closed with the encouragement that 'It is my prayer that the Jesus' teaching of the radical nature of the kingdom and the heart of God will inspire your community this year to expect the unexpected.' In the beginning weeks of term 3 and mid-way through the year, we could certainly agree that this has been a year of learning to expect and live with the unexpected.

The reading this week picks up the imagery of the kingdom of God again with Matthew providing a carefully organised set of stories. Matthew groups together seven parables. The parable of the sower, the weeds, the mustard seed, the yeast, the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, and the net. Each parable providing the opportunity for us to use our imagination to reflect on God's word for us. Perhaps in staff devotions staff could have time to wonder about the imagery and what kind of God is emerging through these stories. What was the significance of a seed, bread pearl, net etc in Jesus' time? What is expected here? What is unexpected?

Interestingly these parables reveal diverse socioeconomic settings:

- a sower of seed,
- a woman baking bread,
- a fortune seeker, a merchant,
- a commercial fisher.

Each of these stories identifies a common individual going about their work and in the ordinariness of their tasks we are invited to see signs of the kingdom of heaven. These parables remind us that God is at work in the day-to-day of our lives and through us, bringing his loving presence and kingdom into the world. The parables invite us to use our imagination to wonder about God's love for us and to cultivate the practice of seeing God's work in the midst of the ordinary and the unexpected.

In this week's reading, and in the midst of a year that has certainly had more than its share of the unexpected we are reminded again that Jesus ushers in a very different kingdom and way of being for his followers that is centred in mercy, kindness, humility and empowering love. As we use these parables to wonder about God's love for us and be challenged by the many different possible interpretations, the epistle reading for this week provides real certainty.

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38,39

What an opportunity to share and live this in Lutheran education communities.

We believe in the love-kingdom of God, through Christ upon us, within us, beyond us.

We believe the love-kingdom is like a mustard seed; sown in apparent insignificance, growing into magnificence for the greening of the world.

We believe the love-kingdom is like yeast; inserted in humble insignificance into the dough of life, expanding into enough bread for the world.

We believe the love-kingdom of God is like a treasure; lost and rendered insignificant under the ground, now found with joy and thanksgiving.

We believe the love-kingdom of God is like pearls; all others become insignificant when the largest, most beautiful pearl of all is found.

We believe the love-kingdom of God is like a net full of fish; where even insignificant sardines are saved but worm-ridden barracouta are thrown away.

We believe in the love-kingdom of God, through Christ upon us, within us, beyond us; where the meek and the poor, the merciful and the hungry, rejoice with the angels of God.

Loving God, we believe; scatter our unbelief.

Bruce Prewer

Resources

Kingdom seeds <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/kingdom-seeds>

When describing abstract concepts we often use similes and metaphors
https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3351

How to pray with the parables <https://www.catechist.com/how-to-read-reflect-on-and-pray-the-parables/>

Sacred space <https://www.sacredspace.ie/scripture/matthew-1344-52>

The parables Christian Studies resource <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zvvg2sg/revision/2>

Video: How to read the parables of Jesus The Bible project https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XX-aAg4_U2Q

Song: Chris McClarney Breakthrough <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=es0FeZZ0zDM>

Song: 10 000 reasons // What a beautiful name Caleb and Kelsey
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8ewQz5Y4EM>