

Proper 12, July 30, 2017
Fr Joshua D Nelson
Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Another week another parable. Well actually Five Short parabolic phrases. “The Kingdom of Heaven is like . . .” over and over again. Today I'd like us to focus on three of those parabolic phrases. First the yeast, then the mustard seed and tree, followed by a pearl of great value.

First let's talk about yeast. I have a good friend from college who enjoys cooking as much as I do. We enjoy the eating as well. One day a few years back he decided he was going to make his own sourdough bread from scratch. Now normally when one makes sourdough one uses a starter. In community starters are shared. A fermenting pile of living goop called the mother is portioned off and spread around to add yeast to the dough. When making sourdough completely from scratch, one must also create the starter. So you mix a little yeast and a little water and maybe a little flour and let it sit in the open air. My friend mixed his yeast starter, opened all his windows, and allowed the pollen and flavors from outside to come in and work their way into his creation. The house began to smell like a brewery. Every other day or so he would check on it, tap it down, and watch as it grew. One morning he awoke to a terrible stench. He got up from his bed and made his way to the living room. He began gagging as soon as he opened the door. Through the foggy eyes of an early morning without coffee he saw the disaster before him. His hopes of sourdough from scratch were dashed when he saw wet, yeasty goop on every surface of his house. The mother had exploded! It was on the floor, on the furniture, cemented to the windows, and even on the ceiling.

That is the kind of yeast that was used in the biblical kitchen. Not the neat little package of active dry yeast one buys at Martin's, but a wet, gooey, gloopy, stinky mess that one cares for as a precious commodity. You protect the yeast because bread is the center of your life and community. While the men discuss politics in the gate of the city, the women and children gather around the oven at the center of town making all the real decisions. From a very small starter the woman in the parable adds her yeast mixture to multiple measures of flour. By watching it carefully and protecting the mixture it grows, and grows, and grows, and grows. From just a little bit of yeast comes more bread than she could ever need herself in a year. With everything leavened there is enough to share so that everyone may have their daily bread.

So how does this connect to a mustard seed? Mustard comes from a very small seed and grows into a leafy plant. Now the translation we have is a little deceiving. The type of mustard that grows in Israel doesn't become a tree. Instead it becomes a leafy shrub only about one foot in diameter. Not really the type Jesus is describing in the parable. The little mustard seed he describes has something miraculous happen. It grows, and grows, and grows, and grows. It has become like a tree and the birds of the air find rest in its branches. As with the yeast in the mixture, what we are meant to learn about the kingdom of God is the end result of the story. The Kingdom of God does not remain a tiny seed. It grows beyond its expectation because it is available to all. It is a place of rest for those who wish to make home within its

branches. In a few moments I will welcome you to come to the table of the Lord. We gather here to have a foretaste of the Heavenly banquet. At the altar this morning we are blessed to glimpse even a small corner of the Kingdom of God.

Now what about the pearl of great value? Jesus says that a merchant, who on finding a pearl of great value, sold all that he had and bought it. Like our bad farmer from a few weeks ago, here we have a bad merchant. Not only is he now homeless, but he is no longer a merchant. A merchant lives his life buying and selling and bartering. To be a merchant (or as in greek: an Emporia) you must have a variety of things to sell or an emporium. This guy is willing to give up everything, including his identity, to obtain this one thing. The Kingdom of God must be pretty good if one is willing to go to such lengths to reach it.

When I broke my foot three years ago, I had to move back in with my parents and was held up in bed for nearly three months. In that time, I made it to church maybe twice. I only received the banquet of Christ's Body and Blood twice. Now the church I grew up in only had communion once or twice a year. It bothered me a little, but I always went along with it and became used to it. I didn't know what I was missing. Then I found the value. I found the Eucharist. I found the deep, deep grace of receiving regularly. I found the joy of a community that shares in the breaking of bread. I began to see the crumbs of that table spread out into the world. And when I spent some time going without any of that, I realized just how precious it is. I understood the merchants willingness to give up everything to have the pearl in his life. I found myself willing to give up everything to be with Jesus, to be with the Body of Christ, to dwell in the Kingdom of God.

Saint David's may appear to be just a small community. But we continue to grow in many ways without even realizing it. Does this community provide your daily bread? Does this community offer you a place to rest? What are you willing to do to share this precious body with others?

In a few moments we will be presenting our offerings and oblations at this altar. We will gather to rest and receive at the rail. Then we are called to go out and share. We do this through many different forms of ministry, evangelism, and outreach. In a few weeks we will bring filled back packs before this altar to be blessed and sent out. Periodically, crumbs from this table, portions of the blessed sacrament are taken beyond this railing to be offered to those unable for one reason or another to join in body. So we take The Body to them. And today we will begin a new tradition to bear witness to the fullness of God's abundance. With our monetary offerings, I have asked that the basket of goods for St John's Food Pantry be brought up as well, to be blessed at this altar and taken beyond this rail to share with the world some daily bread, to provide rest, and to showcase the preciousness of the Kingdom of God. We are going to continue this practice on the Fourth Sunday of every month, because it is at the end of the month when the needs of the world around us are the greatest. We will offer whatever we have, whether that be an abundance of sundry items or one can of tuna fish. I encourage you to think about what crumbs you take from this table out into the world. How might the love we share in this little starter expand the dough? How does our mother, the church, help us to grow? or how might our seeds produce a mighty tree? So this is the Parable of St David's:

the little community, full of love, with something precious to offer the world. Let us continue in this good work that God is calling us to do, and see how He is welcoming us to be examples of His Kingdom.

AMEN