

## (6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany)

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February 17, 2019

Matthew 13

“The Kingdom of God is like....”

This past Monday, I was once again teaching Political Science. As they begin to learn about the formation of our own political system, we first needed to help them better understand the various forms of governments that have existed and still do.

We discussed the various forms of governments found in our world - Dictatorships, Theocracies, Single-Party Rule, Direct Democracy, Parliamentary Democracy, and Presidential Democracy.

Before we began to discuss these various forms of government, I reminded the students that at its core, politics is simply how we humans, in informal and formal ways, relate to one another. I suggested that they think about how their own family systems (households) are “governed”. As we went through the lesson, they began to laugh and smile as they recognized which form of government seem to fit in their home. Sam might have said his home was ruled by a “Theocracy” which is the rule by religious leaders.

All these forms of government also apply to churches too. Some are ruled by a single leader, who to some might be a dictator. Others have a Direct Democracy, which is a congregational polity. Presbyterians have a Representational Form of Government, electing Elders, Deacons and Ministers to represent and serve the interests of its members. Actually, if you our United States Government is based on the Presbyterian system. That is why King George referred to the Revolution as that “Presbyterian Rebellion”.

Speaking of Kings, that is the another form of government. Monarchs who rule over kingdoms.

While there are still some countries, like Saudi Arabia, that have an actual form of Monarchical rule, most, like in Britain, are now just symbolic, harkening back to a different era.

Kings and Queens no longer rule over kingdoms and their loyal subjects. Such language is considered archaic, outdated. If we do use this type of language, we tend to associate it with fairy tales or fantasy literature, like in the George R.R. Martin’s “The Game of Thrones”.

So how do we, who have never lived in a “kingdom” under the rule of a “king”; relate to the Scriptures when it speaks of “kings” and “kingdoms”?

The Gospels are also filled with “Kingdom” language. Every Sunday, when we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we say, “Thy Kingdom Come”.

As we just read, Jesus says to his audience and to us, “The Kingdom of God is like....”

I am guessing for many people, if you are like me, it is difficult to understand what Jesus was referring to when he speaks of “The Kingdom of God”.

Wouldn’t it make more sense to say the, “Nation of God” or the, “Country of God?” Maybe referring to God as “President”?

Actually, some have tried to use such contemporary language in when they wrote paraphrase versions of the Bible. But like so many of those versions, like the “Blue Jean” Bible have, if you will pardon the pun, they “faded” away.

So here we are today still trying to make sense of Jesus' speaking of the "Kingdom of God," telling us through the use of the literary device we refer to as parables, that it is like....a sower who sowed good seed, yeast hidden in dough, a tiny mustard seed, a valuable treasurer buried in a field, a merchant who finds a priceless pearl, or a master of a household who brings out his treasurers - old and new.

Matthew's original audience, as I mentioned, would have some understanding of such kingdom imagery. They had lived under a Monarchal rule as kingdom dwellers ever since Saul was anointed their first king. Herod was their current king, though even he ruled under the oppressive regimen of a Roman Emperor and its powerful Empire. They long hoped for the return of a king like David who would once again make Israel great again by restoring its kingdom.

Jesus knew well the history of his Jewish people. So did Matthew. In speaking of the Kingdom of God, Jesus was inviting his audience to imagine a kingdom not as a nation defined by borders nor a place that could be protected by a wall for security purposes. Jerusalem had one of those, and a lot of good it did them in protecting them from the Romans.

No, God's Kingdom was not defined by borders or walls, it was as Jesus said, within us, all of us.

In speaking of the Kingdom of God using this type of imagery, he was inviting his audience to use their sacred imagination as they seek what is already present in and around them.

Rev. Tim Suttle, who is a writer, pastor and musician, says: **"When Jesus spoke in parables...he's trying to 'create readiness, to nudge people toward receptive insight...He's trying to get them to see the old stories in a new way. He's trying to build in them an imagination that can see the later tree in seed.the kingdom of God is powerful, like yeast hid in the dough, can change the whole thing.The kingdom is hidden because the quest or the journey you have to take in order to find it is actually what will transform you into the kind of person who can see the it in the first place, and then participate in it.'**

Jesus wanted his audience to not just use their eyes to see, but their hearts and minds too. As we like to encourage our students their imagination, to see in new the old in new ways.

Yeast hidden in dough, is a powerful transforming agent. You who bake understand this. The mustard seed may be tiny, but if you understand its future transformation, you see it turning into a large tree, one provides shelter. Things like hidden treasures buried in a field that is discovered by someone who might have walked over it for years or a pearl of great value that is hidden within, one that has been developing for years, are wonderful images for the Kingdom of God.

In using these everyday things, Jesus is inviting us to go on a journey of discovery, a quest for something new, but to do so, not in traveling to some exotic, distant land. No, Jesus wants us to go on this quest, by looking within ourselves, and all around us, in our everyday lives, in our every day circumstances at home, at school, at work, at play, cooking, farming, shopping in order to discover what is hidden in plain sight of all of us.

This quest of discovery is for the truly committed who seek the Kingdom of God. It is for, as Jesus says, those willing to risk everything and sell all they have owned, leaving behind all they have held near and dear when they discover the Kingdom of God hidden within.

Tim Suttle invites us to consider it this way: **“What if the Kingdom of Heaven is hidden in the conversations, and food, and music, and friendships; the books, and music, and films and artwork; the faces of our kids; in the joys of life, and in the sorrow, the healing and the brokenness, in the normal everyday work and rest that fills our daily lives? Maybe that’s why Jesus told these parables about ordinary people doing ordinary things: farmers & fields, women & bread, merchants buying & selling, and fisherman sorting fish. Maybe he’s trying to tell us that our treasure isn’t buried in some far off exotic place at all. We’re not searching for the last piece to the puzzle. We are facing a great mystery, and everything we need to be at peace with God, with the self, with other, and with the world is already here.”**

Friends, if we refuse to wall ourselves off from others, creating barriers that block us from going on this quest, we will find ourselves transformed into the Kingdom people God created us be, living as one world, one people, loyal above all others, and serving the One who truly is our leader and King.

Amen.