

The 9th Sunday after Pentecost, July 26, 2026

St. Andrew's Church, Kitchener

Holy Communion/Eucharist, 8:00 a.m./10:00 a.m.

Revised Common Lectionary (Pr. 17; Yr. A): Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Preacher: Gerry Mueller

For the last two Sundays the Gospels have been what have been called the parables of the Kingdom¹, picturesque descriptions of the Kingdom of Heaven. We've had the parable of the sower, and the parable of the wheat and the weeds. Today's Gospel is effectively a grab bag, even containing some "one-liners". As a complete description of the Kingdom, it sounds a lot like the blind people trying to describe the elephant. You know the story,: one has a hold of the trunk, "The elephant is a vine"; another is feeling the tail, "No, the elephant is a snake"; the one feeling the tusks says, "You are both wrong. The elephant is a spear." One has a hold of a leg, "No, no, no! The elephant is a tree trunk." And one feeling along the side insists, "The elephant is a tent." As descriptions of the Kingdom of Heaven, the five parables in today's Gospel offer **glimpses** of the **undescribable**. Nevertheless, let's briefly look at each of them, to see what they tell us, and what gems of **inclusivity** and insight might be hidden among them.

With respect, the parable of the mustard seed exaggerates, even if Jesus **did** tell it. Mustard seed is neither the smallest of seeds, a dandelion seed is smaller, nor does it grow into a tree in which

¹ What follows draws heavily on the book by Robert Farrar Capon, **The Parables of the Kingdom**, Eerdmans, 1991

birds can nest - at best, mustard is a smallish shrub. But, nit-picking aside, the point of the parable is that the fullness of the Kingdom is contained in a very small seed, that **this** small seed is already **all** of the Kingdom of Heaven, and when it is fully grown, it is out of all proportion to what it started from. And notice the symbolism of the "peaceable kingdom"; there is not a hint of evil having any effect or even being present - all you have is the sun shining, the seed growing, birds flying in and out of the shade, and all the little creatures of God happily twittering away. There is **nothing** in **this** parable to make **you** think that the Kingdom won't come unless **you** ride shotgun for it; nothing says that God needs **your** cooperation to make the Kingdom come out **right**, nothing suggests that you need particular heroics of faith of **any** kind to get in; nothing, **except** the invitation to lounge in its shade.

I confess that I don't know much about plants (just ask June!); I do know about bread making. I used to make bread, but not for a long while, because unfortunately bread-making leads to bread-eating - with butter! And since fresh bread is so much better than day-old, it leads to eating it quickly. And, I don't think that personal growth concentrated around one's waist is what Jesus had in mind when speaking about the growth of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The parable of the yeast in the dough presents some interesting

images. "The Kingdom ... is like yeast ... mixed in ... flour until all of it was leavened." In the original Greek, the word translated "mixed in" has the same root as our word "encrypt." (The KJV used "hid" as the translation; a better choice I think.) This implies the Kingdom, - "the yeast" - is not just mixed into the world - "the flour" - but is hidden so that it is difficult (impossible?) to extract. Once dough is made, one can't find the yeast separately. So it is with the Kingdom in the world, we cannot separate it, or identify it, and so we might want to resist our usual attempts at judging **parts** of the world, maybe even **people**, as inside or outside the Kingdom. This parable suggest the kingdom is hidden in **everything**.

More passing observations. God, who mixes the kingdom into the world, is a baker-**woman**, one of the many female images of God that can be found (hidden - encrypted?) in Scripture. And also, this is not a small home-baking operation. The amount of flour is about one bushel, and adding the water needed, you have about 100 pounds of dough. Another image of the **abundance** of the Kingdom.

Second, if you've made bread, you know that kneading is needed for dough to rise. Kneading creates gluten, which toughens the dough, which traps the expanding bubbles of gas that form from the yeast. And thus, just perhaps, **resistance** to the kingdom, evil, is necessary, if the kingdom is to **grow** in the world. Perhaps the

kingdom needs something to "work against" to expand. Further, since dough rises through the expansion of gas, and since in Greek (and also Hebrew) "gas," "breath," "wind," and "Spirit" are the same word, we have a lovely image of the Holy Spirit breathing into, filling and expanding into the world, as the Kingdom grows against all resistance that can be brought against it. Even our foot-dragging, our back-sliding, our active sinning; it's **all** part of the day's work for the Kingdom.

The parable of the treasure is one of the hiddenness of the Kingdom. It is hidden in a field - the world - and once someone has found it, it is so desirable, so wonderful, that they give up **everything** to own it. The word "hidden" is the same word that in the previous parable is translated as "mixed in." Again, the kingdom is "encrypted" in the world. And notice that the person wanting the treasure, having found and re-hidden it, knowing **exactly** where it is, has to buy the **entire** field. They cannot just buy the part with the treasure. So it is with us. In order to possess the Kingdom, we need to embrace the entire world - good, bad, and indifferent - we cannot separate out only that **part** which we think is the Kingdom.

The next parable, the pearl of great price, seems at first to **contradict** this. A pearl merchant searches for the best, finest pearl, and when it is found, sells everything in order to buy it.

The merchant, the seeker of the Kingdom, finds the object of desire, and buys **only** it. This seems to suggest that the Kingdom can be identified and separated. But note that the searcher is in the pearl **business** - in the Kingdom-finding business. And so are we, and **all** humanity. The search for **meaning** is the human quest. And when we find it, we are often willing to invest a great deal of ourselves. To my mind, this parable is not about being able to **find** the Kingdom, but about willingness to invest **all** in the quest. Indeed, again the Greek text hides insights. In the previous parable, the Greek says that the purchaser of the field sells "what he has" to buy the field; in this parable the merchant sells "all things that he has" to buy the pearl. And the words translated as "sell" are different; the one in this parable also being used as "sold into slavery" elsewhere. The impression is that buying the pearl, the Kingdom, has more of an **all** or **nothing** quality to it.

And so we come to the parable of the net, the longest and most detailed in this sequence. It clearly seems to have a judgmental flavour about it; good and evil are separated out of the net, and evil is thrown into the furnace of fire. For those wanting to be in the righteousness business, complaining about the inclusion of both good **and** evil within the Kingdom in other parables, this one is the winner. The good gets rewarded, the bad gets it in the neck; that's the way a **proper** Kingdom of Heaven ought to be run!

But hold on. This is no **ordinary** net. This word for "net" occurs only once in the New Testament, here, and from other, contemporary, texts, we know it to mean a "drag net." This is not a gaff net, which selects fish of a certain kind and size, turning others back or letting them through. Nor is it a purse net, an oversized bag which is lowered into a school of fish and scoops them up. No, this net is **dragged** through the sea, and indiscriminately gathers up **everything** in its way. And not just fish, even though the parable as it was read says the net "caught **fish** of every kind." The Greek text does **not** contain the word "fish", it is supplied by the translators trying to help us make sense of the text - a good example of **translation** actually being **interpretation**. In Greek the passage simply says the Kingdom is like "a drag net, of **every kind** gathering together." So I feel perfectly free to suggest that this net gathers not just every kind of fish, but seaweed, old boots, beer bottles, and pop cans. We are not talking about fly-fishing for trout here, but about the Kingdom moving through the world and scooping up everything, everything(!), that it encounters. And so once again we have an image of an **indiscriminate** Kingdom of Heaven, which includes all, good **and** bad, valuable **and** junk.

Oh yes, **eventually** there is a separation; but in the meantime, in **our** time, it behoves us to not be too selective about who **we** let in. It is not possible for **us** to judge who is in the net of the

Kingdom, and who isn't; in fact, from the parable, nothing and no one isn't in the net. The separation of the evil from the righteous will happen at the **end** of time, and will be done by angels, under the direction of the risen and returned Christ, who **presumably** knows what He is doing. We also need to remember that the redemption offered in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is extended to all creation, not just the bits **we** favour. Further, at the end, Jesus Christ, who was lifted up on the cross in order to draw **all** to himself (isn't that another image of a drag net gathering fish, weeds, bottles, cans and old boots!) will only separate the willfully, deliberately evil, who **reject** him, for that is what the Greek text says. Those of us who were merely somewhat slow, or dumb, or clumsy, and those of us who sinned despite ourselves, or through circumstances, will be sorted into the good pile. That's an awful lot of hope and **Good News**, for a bunch of varied fish, weeds, bottles, cans, and old boots!

Some seed, yeast, treasure, pearls, fish, and assorted junk, for **your** Summer reflections.