

Sermon for Proper 12

The Text: Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

Christians around the world love to pray the Lord's Prayer both personally and with other Christians. Can you imagine how many times the Lord's Prayer is being shared around the world on this day alone? This prayer is being prayed millions of times.

Amongst other petitions, the Lord's Prayer includes the petition "your Kingdom come."

We say this often, but what exactly do we mean by "Your kingdom come?" It is God's Kingdom we want to see come.

Luther says: in his explanation: "God comes to rule as king even if we do not ask for this to happen. But in this prayer we are asking: "Father come and rule over us".

Luther goes on to pose a question: "How does God's kingdom come?" Luther answers his own question by saying: "God our Father comes to rule over us by giving us the Holy Spirit, so that by God's goodness to us we believe his holy word and live as his people on earth now and in heaven forever."

In today's Gospel reading Jesus helps us grow in our understanding of God's kingdom—God's eternal reign of love.

In Matthew's gospel, God's rule is called the 'Kingdom of Heaven'. And each of today's parables give us another glimpse of what his kingdom is like. What we discover in these parables is that God's kingship changes everything about our world, our values and our priorities. These parables may look simple on the surface, but when understood in their original context they are full of surprise!

In order to fully understand today's parables, we need to recognise just how controversial they were when Jesus first shared them. It is then that they will bring new vision to our world, our values and our priorities. Let's start with the parable of the mustard seed—v31-32. On first glance this is a charming story about how God might make use of things beyond our common expectation. The mustard seed, a tiny seed becomes a home for birds to nest in. We might quickly

conclude that God can use even the smallest of faith to grow something great—even abundant, enough to bless others. The Mustard Seed parable might be easily reduced to the saying: "From little things big things grow." But there is much more in this parable: You see, the mustard plant is closer to being a weed than it is to being a precious valued plant. When we think of mustard we often think of the yellow squeeze bottles of mustard sauce that we might add to hamburgers and hot dogs. That might make the mustard plant sound palatable.

But in reality the mustard plant grows like a weed—more like soursobs or thistles or dandelions.

Once one mustard seed gets a corner in your field—watch out—it will take over! Maybe the strangest part of this parable is that the mustard seed will never grow into a big strong tree like a cedar tree. Yet, Jesus chooses to use it as a picture of God's kingdom.

The Mustard seed has a natural ability to reproduce and spread far and wide—it is hardy.

If we look back over the history of the world over the past 2000 years we can see how the rule of God in Christianity has spread like a mustard seed weed around the world! It has transformed the world bringing God's love to life for many and it continues to do so in a humble earthy way.

Let's move onto the next parable—the parable of the yeast in verse 33. Again, this parable would have immediately grabbed the attention of those who first heard it.

Why? Because of the yeast. Elsewhere in scripture yeast is used to represent the world and is almost always used as a negative symbol of corruption. Here yeast is presented as something good!

And the amount of bread being made by the woman would have also surprised the hearer. Usually they would make just enough for themselves, but here the woman is making enough bread to feed more than 100 people at once! We could simply conclude that this parable shows how a little can make a lot. But deeper, it also indicates that God's rule may take hold in hidden and unexpected ways and bring about change in ways that are beyond our imagination.

Our text then jumps to verses 44-46 and shares two more parables. One about the treasure found in the field and the other about a precious pearl. In these parables we could focus on how the labourer cunningly went and sold all he had just to buy the field where the treasure was hidden. But maybe more importantly we can focus on how the treasure in the field changed his life! God's rule in our life transforms our life for the better!

There is also another way we could read these two parables: In the parable about the pearl and the treasure, we easily focus on how the person sold everything in order to obtain the one prized thing... But what is this treasure? And who is this person who gives up all so that the treasure can be his?

What if we were to understand God as the person making the discovery and we are the treasure he wants to have as his own? Think of who Jesus is. We confess Jesus to be God's one and only Son.

God gave up his one and only Son to suffer and die as the payment for sin so that we could be his prized treasure forever! This might be how we could understand our baptism. In our Baptism God has come and found us and valued us so highly that he paid the price so that we could be his forever!

You are God's great treasure and by the Grace of God alone all who are baptised live with the promise that they belong to God forever. We are part of God's eternal family.

How exciting! What a joy that God now says to us: 'you are my treasure'.

Together as we encourage one another, we can help each other grow to know that we are loved by God and that we are part of God's eternal family. For Jesus has paid the price to claim us as his! In our fellowship we can lead one another to know that – there is nothing that can separate us from God's love. We can give thanks for the ministries of the church here on earth that help to nurture our identity as people who are precious to God and belong to God's kingdom.

Our regional and church wide Children youth and family ministry teams do so much to help our young people grow in their identity as children who are loved and treasured by God. The many Christian

Life week camps that are held in many places each year bring this blessing to many. At these camps our youth are encouraged and mentored by Christian young adults to see themselves as loved by God.

God's kingdom has come to us in the mystery of baptism and his word. God brings us community and connection, life and light. And he continues to transform our world in unexpected ways!

May the Spirit that God gives you lead you to believe his word and live as his people on earth now and in heaven forever. Amen