

Related topics

For further study:

Reign of God (now and not yet); living the mission of Christ; evangelisation; conversion; discipleship; eschatology; heaven/hell; justice; moral imperatives of the reign of God; church's social teaching

Closing Prayer

God, treasury of all that is good;
like seed growing into a mighty tree
and yeast that makes the bread rise,
your kingdom is already working in our midst.
Kindle in us the desire to seek it,
and bestow the wisdom to discern it.
Make us single-minded to pursue it,
and give delight in the finding of it,
so that, with joy in its diversity,
we may announce its richness everywhere.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Celebrating the Christian Year, Proper 12, Year A²

CPL • LBC Year A Proper 12.odt • 2020-06-11

² *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.*

Proper 12

Sunday between 24 and 30 July inclusive

Principal Service readings

1 Kings 3.5-12	Solomon's dream at Gibeon – he is granted wealth and wisdom
Psalms 119.129-136	Eagerness for the law of the Lord
Romans 8.26-39	The help of the Spirit and the glory of God and his love
Matthew 13.31-33, 44-52	Parables about the Kingdom of Heaven (mustard seed; yeast; treasure; pearl; dragnet)

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Parables about the kingdom of heaven

³¹Jesus put before the crowd another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³²it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

³³He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

⁴⁴The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and

throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' ⁵²And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

Matthew 13.31-33, 44-52 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Today in our gospel reading we are given five of the seven parables that there in in Matthew 13. The setting is mostly in a house (13.36), a more intimate space than the lakeside, where Jesus can explain the parables to his disciples. In part of Matthew 13 left out of our reading he explains:

³⁴Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing. ³⁵This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet: 'I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world.'

Matthew 13.34-35 NRSV

quoting Psalm 78.2. Matthew likes to quote the Old Testament. This quotation implies suggests that the obscurities of Jesus' parables is in accordance with the scriptures (see also Matthew 31.10-17). The first parable is the parable of the mustard seed. While the mustard seed may not actually be the smallest seed, the point of the parable is the contrast between small beginnings and the size of a mature plant – a mustard bush might grow to between eight and twelve feet. Like the production of what (13.23) it is a huge result. The yeast also is very tiny, almost invisible but has big results.

Treasure is buried in a field to keep it safe when invasion is threatened. There was a rabbinic debate as to whether the owner was entitled to any treasure found. The parable assumes that he was.

The merchant seeking fine pearls is on a deliberate search (unlike in the previous parable). The great value of the pearl elicits a single-minded response.

The dragnet introduces a different dynamic, as it is indiscriminate. As in the parable of the wheat and the weeds (13.24-30), the good and bad have to be separated when a certain fullness has been reached. It deals with the mixed response to the message of the gospel, and also introduces the idea of patient waiting, and of a final judgement.

Jesus asks whether the disciples have understood these things. They say 'yes', but there are quite a few things to understand: the presence of the kingdom, its small beginnings, the varied responses to it, its extraordinary fullness in the future, and the judgement that will occur. The Matthean Christian treasures the old (the Jewish heritage) and also the new (what has happened in and through Jesus). The new does not make the old useless.

Quotations

1

For it is good to cleave to God, and to put our hopes in the Lord, so that, when we have exchanged this poor life for the kingdom of heaven, we may cry aloud: 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? There is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.' Assuredly, when we have found such wealth in heaven, we may well grieve to have sought after poor passing pleasures here on earth.

Select letters / of St. Jerome, d.420

2

What I love about the Bible is that the story isn't over. There are still prophets in our midst. There are still dragons and beasts. It might not look like it, but the Resistance is winning. The light is breaking through.

So listen to the weirdos. Listen to the voices crying from the wilderness. They are pointing us to a new King and a better kingdom.

Inspired: slaying giants, walking on water, and loving the Bible again / Rachel Held Evans.

2018

¹ New Revised Standard Version Bible is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.