

## Sermon 30 July 2023

### Galatians 6:7-10 Matthew 13:31-33,44-46

In our Gospel reading Jesus uses short parables to shed light on the kingdom of heaven. But what exactly is the kingdom of heaven? To put it succinctly, the kingdom of heaven is when everyone works together with one will to achieve God's will. It is a state of affairs that we can expect to find in heaven, but the challenge is to create that state here on earth. That is why we pray in the Lord's prayer, *'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.'*

In the first parable, Jesus uses the metaphor of the mustard seed to make the point that the kingdom of heaven starts from the smallest of beginnings. It begins with you and me, and hopefully grows into something larger, encompassing many more people.

The mustard seed of Palestine was very small and the Jews often referred to the mustard seed when making a point about the small size of something. The seed then grew into a tree and it was common to see a large flock of birds settled in its branches, as they loved the little black seeds of the tree. The image of these birds symbolises the many people who will find nourishment and refuge in the kingdom of heaven.

The parable of the yeast makes a similar point. It all starts with something small and develops into something larger, though the main point of the yeast is the transforming power of the yeast – we know what a little yeast does to our baking. It causes the main ingredients (that's you and me) to rise into something tasty, nutritious and good. In other words, when we do God's will, we are transformed into something much better than the old self.

A quick observation on a point we have made before. Jesus drew on everyday things for his parables. In the last two weeks we have heard about a farmer sowing seed. Today we hear about the mustard seed, both images of everyday life. Then there is yeast. All bread was baked at home, so every family baked bread. Shortly, we will hear about the fisherman's net – fishing was a way of life in Palestine. Jesus had a wonderful knack of taking everyday activities and turning them into life lessons.

The last metaphor Jesus uses is that of a fishing net. In Palestine there were two ways of fishing. One was the casting net which was cast from the shore and the other was a drag net. This is the way referred to in the parable. The net was cast out behind a boat. There are two lessons in this parable.

Firstly, it is the nature of the drag net that it does not discriminate. All kinds of fish, and even other odds and ends, are caught up in the net. If we can apply this to the church, the church cannot discriminate. We all have a right to belong, every single one of us, no matter our differences or our faults. The church is not just for so-called good people, and in fact, Jesus made it clear that the opposite is the case. He said, *'I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough.'* Mark 2:17.

The second lesson, and one we reflected on last week as the weeds were sorted from the wheat, is that just as the contents of the net are sorted – the good kept and the bad rejected – so we will all be sorted when the time for judgment comes. I repeat the verse I quoted last week, *'For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done.'* 2 Corinthians 5:10.

One very important point to be made here. The judgment is God's, not ours to make. I don't enjoy hearing the statement, 'If you do this, you will go to hell.' Let's just focus on making sure we ourselves end up in the right place and leave the important task making the appropriate decision to God.

To sum up – there is a huge amount of suffering out there. Here are a few facts: more than two billion people are sick in the world at any given time. Infectious diseases and parasites kill more than 17 million people every year. Twenty million women undergo unsafe abortions each year and 70,000 die as a result. Seven hundred million people suffer from sort of mental illness. Diarrhoea kills three million children a year.

On top of that, what man manages to do to his fellow human beings defies imagination. Look what's happening in Ukraine as we speak. A couple of years ago, I read a book called, 'A Long Way to Go.' It is about a boy soldier forced to fight in the civil war in Sierra Leone. Horrific! At times, God must be wonder what on earth he has created (excuse the pun).

So some good news. One of the messages of the parable of the mustard seed is that big things can grow from something quite small. As we have said on more than one occasion, if we apply that to ourselves, we can all do our little bit, and if we all manage to do that, then that can amount to something quite significant.

So let me finish with a story I have shared with you before. I make no apologies about that – a story with a good message is worth repeating, which is why, of course, we read the parables of Jesus over and over again.

Some years ago, a 12-year-old boy in America heard about the hospital Dr Albert Schweitzer was building in Africa, and apparently needed some supplies. He went to his piggy bank, tipped out the money, which came to a couple of dollars. He went to the local pharmacy and bought a packet of aspirin. He then rang the Air Force and asked if the next time they were flying over Africa, could they possibly drop off his box of aspirin to Dr Schweitzer's hospital.

It so happened that the local radio station heard about this boy's request and so they broadcasted the story. Radio stations across the country picked up on the story and people began to contribute to the point where the Air Force did drop off the boy's box of aspirin, along with tonnes of medical supplies worth several million dollars in today's terms. I believe they took the boy along for the ride as well.

This all happened because that little boy believed his small contribution could make a difference. If every single one of us thinks and acts the same, we can change the world! If we don't change the world, we can sure make a difference to our community. And that, my friends, is all about creating a corner of God's kingdom right here in Flat Bush. That is the challenge facing us.

I finish with a quote from our first reading, '*So let us not grow weary in doing what is good, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.*' Galatians 6:9.

Rev Warner Wilder