

Little Bits

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If we take a step back and look at how Jesus changed the world for all times, it is pretty remarkable! He appeared on the scene in Galilee with very little hype. Oh yes, there were the angels announcing his birth thirty odd years ago, but by the time he was ready to preach, people were living rather ordinary lives doing ordinary things. There was that time when he was baptized and the heavens opened, but other than that, there were no cataclysmic announcements, no major natural phenomenon or heavenly fanfare. That is what is truly remarkable about how Jesus entered the ordinary. The first message Jesus says as he begins his ministry is “repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near!” He says these words after John the Baptist left the scene. In other words, his mission is the kingdom of God at hand.

For three years, Jesus kept to that message. It comes to us in little bits. It comes to us in recorded portions of his ministry. It comes from ordinary people who heard and saw what he did. What does the kingdom of heaven look like? Who is going to the kingdom of heaven? How do we get there? On the Sermon on the Mount he tells of the world where blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of God.

All through his ministry, Jesus speaks the language of the people. They did not need educated or even to be literate to understand what he is saying. He uses ordinary things like coins and yeast and lost sons to make his point. He tells stories, parables, to get his message across...turn around people. The kingdom of heaven is near. We read today from Matthew chapter 13 where Jesus is once again explaining what the kingdom of heaven is like. **Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

³¹He put before them 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.”⁴⁴“The 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.⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls;⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.⁴⁷“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind;⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad.⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁵¹“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.”⁵² And 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.”

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Ok, take your pick. We have many images of the kingdom of heaven in these verses. A tiny unassuming seed that grows into something significant. A miniscule bacterium when mixed with flour and water produces growth and something that gives us life. A treasure that we cannot see because it is hidden...yet worth so much, that a person would give up everything to obtain it. **Which one resonates with you?** What is the kingdom of heaven like? Jesus chooses his examples carefully to produce the maximum understanding. As a result, the writers remember what he says and recount it later as they write it in the gospels.

A seed of a common plant becomes a necessary ingredient to a staple of life, an item of value that is hidden from view, a pearl among many pearls and fish that are gathered then separated. What do they have in common? They are all things that we can easily overlook. They are part of the landscape...normally we would not think of them as special or extraordinary. Jesus uses these things we often pass by and do not spend much time thinking about as illustrations for the keynote of his message. The kingdom of heaven is here in the ordinary.

Nestled in the commonplace is the knowledge that the kingdom of heaven is so important that when we recognize it, it will take precedent over everything else. How can these little bits be so powerful to make us change the course of our life? What would be so extraordinary, yet within our grasp, to experience? What would be so influential that it would cause us to remain in less than ideal situations because of it? Why would God make a difference in our lives? **The answer is love** -- God's love for us and our response to that love.

Today we welcomed Isabella and Gabriella into the community of the church. If we have one thing that we can share with them about why we are in the church together, it would be **God's love** -- God's love for them, for us and for the world. The world can be complex and difficult. God's love is like a tiny seed that grows. God's love is like microscopic yeast that makes things happen. As we take God's love into our hearts, it expands and grows.

On Sunday mornings, Gregg and I wake up to Krista Tippett's "On Being." This morning she aired a conversation she had in the past with Congressman John Lewis. I woke up to him saying that the protesting on the Edmund Pettus Bridge (where his skull was fractured) was an act of love. The times he went to jail for the rights for all to vote, were acts of love. All the things he did for civil rights were acts of love.

Jesus is telling us the kingdom of heaven is near. Jesus is sharing that we can see it if we look. We can get a little bit of a glimpse when love is what moves us and our actions. That is what makes gathering in any way so important. That is why the Ham's wanted to come, masks and all, to have Gabriella and Isabella baptized in Christ's name with the community participating from afar. The act of baptism, the gathering in spite of all our roadblocks, people coming here to sing to an empty room, brings us closer to the kingdom of heaven. Together we can imagine a love so powerful and so strong it can move mountains. A love so great that God chose to live among us to tell us about it. The kingdom of heaven is near...get ready for it! We cannot be passive recipients to the kingdom. We need to look for it, recognize it and live like we mean it. Live in the love that God teaches us and act as if it is the most precious thing to us. Sometime today, take a moment to consider what heaven

will be like for you. Will it be a place that gives you comfort? Is it heaven on earth that you need to uncover? How can we understand what the kingdom of heaven is like? Can you collect your thoughts about what the kingdom of heaven is like? I would love to know your thoughts on it. Please share them with me and I will share them anonymously with all of you.

The kingdom of heaven is like...

Jesus concludes his explanation of what the kingdom of heaven is like with this verse: "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."

We, the church, are the scribes, the keepers of God's story that is shared with each new generation. God entrusts us with this message. We need to keep God's word growing for Gabbi and Izzi and all who gather near and far. We have this precious gift of God's love and it is up to us to share that in ways that folks can understand. We cannot rely on our schools, or our government, or our world leaders to teach what the kingdom of heaven is like. We cannot leave it to others to teach the power of love through Christ. We are called to hold that treasure present and high for all to see. How can we express it in both old and new ways? Jesus tells us what it means for the kingdom of heaven to be real and present. What a precious gift it is. He tells it so that Peter (a fisherman), Nicodemus (a Pharisee) and Matthew (a tax collector) can understand it. Their lives are changed because of it. This is what we are about...always seeking how we can express the kingdom of heaven in the midst of the ordinary. Now is the time to change, to reorder our thinking, because the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!

Thanks be to God. Amen