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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church  
8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 12/Year A  
July 30, 2017  
Text: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

### What is the kingdom of heaven like?

Early on as Jesus went about his earthly mission he taught his disciples how to pray. He said, *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. You will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

I suppose that all of us have our own images of what heaven might be like. We have leftover images taught us in Bible school and religion classes. Artists throughout the centuries have given us more of the same visuals, visuals of winged angels and cherubs and seraphim and indistinguishable figures surrounding the throne of God and lots of clouds, pearly gates, and perhaps streets paved with gold and lined with precious stones. We've heard and read accounts of people who had near death experiences and described traveling through dark tunnels and into places filled with bright lights, figures and faces. And our own personal images and ideas of what heaven must be like have morphed and are ever evolving because to comprehend heaven is just too great for these human minds of ours. And so heaven for some of us might be a great full body massage. Sitting on a lounge chair on the beach with wonderful weather, a good book, sand between our toes, and sipping on a Mai Tai. Heaven could be hearing a choir singing out in full voice a favorite hymn. Absolute peace and quiet after a full day's work. A scrumptious meal.

Yet throughout these last few Sundays Jesus has gently led us back to look at the holy with new eyes-to focus on God and God's reign. To remind us of the kingdom that is coming and already.

From the very beginning of Jesus' ministry he taught that God and God's kingdom were not to be found in some distant faraway place or reserved for the hereafter, the sweet bye and bye, but that the kingdom of God is in the midst of God's people. He used parables to explain God's presence in the lives of people and in the world. He said things like 'God is like the owner of a vineyard.' 'The kingdom of God is like a landowner

who went out early to hire laborers.’ “The kingdom of God is like”, is like, is like...

And in the passage we heard this morning, Jesus makes even more comparisons of the kingdom. Common images that the people of his day and ours might understand. But notice his comparisons aren't things of epic proportions.

Jesus says that the kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed capable of growing into a tree where birds can find shelter.

The kingdom of God is like a bit of yeast that mixed in with flour can be baked into a loaf of bread to feed a family.

The kingdom of God is like a treasure that had been hidden or buried in a field or found in the sea.

The kingdom of God is like a net thrown out empty into the water and drawn back filled with fish.

Each of these hidden things; the seed, the yeast, the buried treasure, the pearl and a net cast into the sea, all have the potential to yield something more marvelous than first realized. But take notice that the seed had to be planted. The yeast had to be mixed in with flour and other ingredients and kneaded and shaped and baked. Someone found the treasure and then sold everything he owned to buy the field. The other finds the one pearl that stood out from the others and risked everything to buy it. The net had to be thrown out into the water, lifted filled with fish onto the boat that are then sorted out along the shore.

All of these things took action. They required something. Nothing happens by osmosis. Even in the hidden and smallest of ways, Jesus reminds us, the kingdom of heaven is realized here on earth. They all show the power of God working through the people of God and in the world.

Sure it is sometimes hard to see it beyond the busyness and drama alive and well in the world today. But God's kingdom is also alive and well. God's kingdom requires our ability to see and trust beyond life's foggy and to allow God to use us as God's instruments and beacons of his kingdom here on earth.

I don't think Jesus meant for us to stand by and hope God does everything for us. If that were the case, Jesus wouldn't have instructed his followers to love, to serve, to teach, to heal, to comfort, to feed, to act with compassion and be about justice. To help usher God's kingdom here on earth requires our own commitment however large or small.

What is the kingdom of heaven like?

The kingdom of heaven is like the stranger on the plane soothing a restless infant of a parent who could not comfort their child. The kingdom of heaven is like a police officer who joins in shooting hoops at a neighborhood basketball game instead of chastising kids for having fun. The kingdom of heaven is like the cashier who pays the bill of a single mother towing five little ones under the age of eight. The kingdom of heaven is like a teacher donating a kidney so that her student might live. The kingdom of heaven is like a person paying a kindness forward. The kingdom of heaven is like a class or civic or parish group or individual donating money or spending a couple of hours preparing boxes of supplies for the 'Feed My Starving Children' Program.

The kingdom of heaven is like the individuals who quietly acknowledge birthdays, sicknesses, and anniversaries, who volunteers to answer office phones, sets up the coffee pot, changes out light bulbs, who plants flowers and pulls weeds, allows a friend to vent, to laugh, to cry, who writes their elected official daily in pursuit of justice, who buys those extra cans of tuna and toilet paper for a neighbor or the food pantry, who calls just to check in, gives great bear hugs, who steps right in when others look perplexed, and who acknowledges the stranger who comes through the door.

The kingdom of heaven is like and like and like and like...Well, you fill in the blank. Fill it in with your witness and see the kingdom of God more clearly.

Amen.