



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

Jesus put before the crowds another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it 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.”

He 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.”

“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.

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

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So, it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” 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.”

Grace and Peace from the mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

Nothing is as it appears. No wonder Jesus began many of his parables with the words, “The kingdom of heaven is like...” In the kingdom of the world, everything seems obvious. In the kingdom of heaven, there is unfolding surprise. In the kingdom of the world, we label everything. In the kingdom of heaven, words and labels can become obstacles to ultimate reality.

For example, even though the difference between a weed and any other plant is entirely subjective and situational, we have determined that there are botanical categories for weeds. To us, a weed is simply any plant growing where it is not wanted. When it competes with cultivated plants or lawns, a flowering plant can become a weed, especially when it spreads aggressively or invades space intended for other plants.

That right there is enough to ponder. Take a moment and reflect.

There have been times in my life where I have perceived myself or been perceived as a weed, almost an intrusion in the situation. Thank God for the Jesus of the kingdom of heaven who saw what I could not. Who valued a big giant shrub like a mustard shrub and called it a tree! The mystic Jesus appears to see things differently than I do. Even differently than I see myself.

When Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven, perhaps it is an invitation to see ourselves and others as he sees them—to see life, even if only for one moment, without the filters of the kingdom of the world.

What holds us back from seeing what is hidden? Perhaps we simply accept anything we do not understand, or anything hidden from us as too risky to explore. We would rather remain with our present doom or our familiar joy because, like an abused child, it is the only parent we have known—the only way we know love.

Perhaps we sit in pews and accept any of the teachings because it's the only God we've been taught. We dare not offend the rewarder of good things or the leadership that drew my allegiance. We are trained to recognize what we've labeled as weeds and use these very scriptures to divide everything into good and bad.

But when we live life from the kingdom of the world, we do not plunge the depths of the hidden to see the possibilities of transformation. If we would simply look back on our lives we will see mustard seeds, pearls and yeast.

We remember events that were the mustard seeds of invasion, the yeast of corruption and buried hopes and dreams.

We know we are experiencing things today in ways we could not imagine before. We love looking at old pictures. When the images of our children were small, we could not imagine what life would be like them today. When our lives were small for that matter, we had no idea what we would grow into. All was created from nothing and molded by everything. Our lives are many movements of transformation.

Philosopher Eric Hoffer says that what separates a successful movement from an unsuccessful movement is faith in the future and extravagant hope. I would say the same is true of our movement into the kingdom of heaven and our soulful transformation.

Jesus the great sociologist knew that any movement or change must coincide with faith in the future and an extravagant hope. These two radical qualities of an imaginative person are seen by the soul blinding pragmatism of the world as weeds. To the world, seeds of hope and faith are too small and easily blown, but Jesus sees them as trees.

By plunging the depths of our inner life we are connected to all things, to all people and the earth. The Mustard shrub is nothing more than a weed to some, to others it will be a tree shade and rest to those weary from all their wing flapping efforts.

Some people view themselves as a piece of land just taking up space. Jesus sees people as having a treasure hidden within themselves. If they knew it contained everything they needed, they would let go of what the ego values or sell it all as the passage says.

The pearl is worthy to be sought. The seeker will never be the same. Upon grasping the pearl at its value, it will shift all the person's priorities like mustard seeds and buried treasures. Life is never the same when we plunge the depths of what is hidden.

Imaginative transformation is cultivated by faith in the future, not fear of the future, and by extravagant hope, not cynical resistance to change. It is life beyond the five senses.

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind can comprehend what God has in store for those who lovingly welcome the mystery we call God.

The kingdom of heaven is a state not a place. In kingdom of there are inconveniences, disruptions and suffering our senses cannot make sense of. The kingdom of heaven resides in the mystery of unfolding meaning and an imaginative inner place and peace.

In this journey of the true self, hidden gems are excavated and discovered along the way. Those present to ultimate reality are not aware that the mustard seed grows into a giant weed. That the giant shrub labeled by the world as a weed will eventually shade and lodge those who have grown weary with their wing flapping.

Richard Rohr says we must be willing to let go of—or “sell”—everything the ego values.

For the ego to let go of what helped us survive and even succeed is not an easy thing. The craving for what was or to hold on to what is like the burning away of a part of us.

Sometimes it is a teeth clenching experience to resist returning to our attachments. Letting go of engrained belief systems and programs for our happiness is like releasing a part of ourselves, just ask my friends in recovery. But it is not really a part of our true self, it is what helped to create our false self.

The drudgery that my life is just a piece of land with no treasure to be excavated, no pearl to be sought and filled with unwanted yeast. This way of thinking is a way to become a card-carrying member of the kingdom of the world.

In order to participate in this spectacular movement toward the true self and our own transformational journey, we must begin to see like the mystic. How do we know when we are seeing life through the eyes of a mystic? We become more aware of our encounters with the divine, our interconnectedness with all things, and we find ourselves loving God and neighbor.

This experience is not for the few and the privileged. It is not reserved for theologians and clergy.

It is not reserved only for those declared mystics; it is accessible to all. When it comes to hidden treasures, pearls, and fish, all we must do is dig, seek, or cast a net. Paradoxically, the hidden gems are not the conclusion of our journey. We experience God's presence in everyday life as we seek, as we dig, and as we cast our nets.

Lest one think I am suggesting this is a reward system, I return to the parables. The treasure was buried by someone else; the seed was planted by someone else; the pearl was not opened by the merchant. All are unearned in the kingdom of heaven. They are experienced when the net of grace has caught us.