

Pentecost 8A, Lectionary 17, July 26, 2020
Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52
Epiphany, Winnipeg

It happened more than once in a class at Seminary. After a bit of a lecture and then a long discussion about something like the fine points of eucharistic theology among Catholic and reforming movements in the sixteenth century, or about the history of the aorist tense in New Testament Greek, or about the hermeneutic function of distancing, the prof said something like, “So, does that make sense now?” And I looked around at a roomful of students who were all also looking around nervously at a roomful of students, and finally someone nodded and then we all said, “Sure, yup. Mmm hmm. Sure.” And most of us didn’t quite get it.

Maybe you’ve had a moment or two like that.

Before Jesus tells all these parables, he says, “I speak to them in parables so that seeing they don’t perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.” He basically says, “I’m speaking in parables all this time so that the people who should get it don’t get it.” Then he tosses out these little comments about wheat and weeds, and he talks about the reign of God being like a mustard seed or yeast in bread or a treasure in a field or someone buying a priceless pearl that they’ve found. Of course. Then he talks about a net that catches fish – that’s what God’s rule is like! – and about angels separating the good from the bad. And once all that is finished he asks the disciples, “So, do understand? Did you get it?” And maybe they look nervously at each other, and one of them nods, and then they all say, “Um, ya, sure. We get it...” And if you listen really closely you might

even hear Jesus saying, or at least thinking to himself, "Really? I don't think so."

I don't get it. I have a hunch most of don't. Quite. Get it.

Maybe you noticed this, though: Again and again Jesus talks about the reign of God as something hidden. It's like a seed that someone takes and puts in the ground, buries in the earth like all seeds need to be. It's like yeast that a woman hides in a lump of dough, it's like a treasure hidden in a field that someone finds...and then hides again. If the kingdom of God is like something that's hidden, maybe it's OK if we don't get it. Maybe we don't need to figure out all these parables. And if the reign of God seems hidden somewhere....

Maybe that's more what life really is....

It's like this: At Christmas we celebrated with Christians all over the world and we heard the song of the angels: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth," and we look around over pretty much all of the history of any people and we can see that there has never really been peace on earth. It's like it's hidden somewhere.

Or we look at people like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks and Barak Obama and we think so much has happened and racism is drawing to a close, and then we see in these last months - on this side of the border too - what we've always known: that racism has not gone away. And we think Truth and Reconciliation in Canada has changed so much and there is going to be healing and justice and equality and so on here, but we see and we know that justice and healing and a right relationship between all the people on this land are more like treasures hidden in a field and we don't know where they are. Or we find the treasures and bury them again.

Or maybe it's simply that the depression won't go away, or the cancer won't go away, or that relationship you thought was OK is slipping away. And the reign of God, with the healing and the hope that it brings, just seems to be hidden away somewhere.

Sometimes what Jesus calls the reign of God just seems like it's hiding. And peace and justice and healing are hiding like yeast, like a seed, like a treasure in the ground. And we don't know when they'll appear.

But maybe these parables remind us that what is hidden will not stay hidden forever. That's why people like Martin Luther King or Rosa Parks did what they did, and it's why indigenous people in Canada and settlers and newcomers will keep on trying to end racism and raise up some kind of justice and healing and right relationships....it's even why people keep taking to the street to protest, because they believe that there is yeast in the dough and it will appear and it will rise to make a loaf, a nation, a people, and there will be enough for everyone, because the yeast will rise and there will be bread for all.

That's why our churches or schools or our country keep trying to figure out how to make sure that there is a place for everyone...because we know that a seed is hiding in the ground, and it's growing to become a tree that provides shelter for all. It's why when my Facebook friend posts something about having such a depressed and broken day, and when I know that she's thinking she's not worth much at all, all kinds of comments flood in from friends who say, "You are loved, you matter," because when she sees herself as an empty field, what everyone around her sees is the treasure that she is.

When Jesus speaks these parables, he's teaching us how to see like disciples. Or, to say it like he said it in the gospel today, he's teaching us to be scribes trained in the kingdom of heaven, who have this treasure and who take out of it what's old and new, and who see that everything in this treasure that we are given is all about life and love and hope and justice and peace and all that good stuff.

And we are learning to see and to expect that there is yeast, always yeast, rising up in this loaf, even here, and making food for all and life for all. We are learning that when everything around looks like it is a barren field and there is no life in it, there is actually a treasure in that field and that treasure is all about life. And when we see an empty garden, or just one shoot of a mustard seed poking through the ground, we are learning to see and to expect that it will grow, the reign of God will grow, into a world where there is shelter for all.

So Jesus asks again, "Have you understood all this? Did you get it?" Yes. Maybe yes? I'm not sure? It's all OK.

Because you know, when Jesus tells these parables, we're just hearing again what we first heard outside an empty tomb on a fresh spring morning: where we thought life was hidden and gone, life will always rise again. That's the reign of God. AMEN.