

July 26, 2020
8TH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST



THE KIN-DOM OF GOD



ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Fairview Heights, IL 62208
618-397-6323

Rev. Rosemary Captain

A NOTE OF EXPLANATION: Recent progressive theologians have been bringing attention to the fact that some words and terms in the Bible are NOT inclusive to all people. The Bible was written in a culture where men ruled and women were considered possessions just as cattle or other farm animals. Women had no rights.

We live in a different culture. Women are considered equal to men. In Genesis 1:27, the first creation story, it reads “So God created humankind in God’s image, in the image of God, they were created; male and female God created them.” Both sexes of humans were created at the same time. Both are in God’s image. Therefore, God is both male and female, not just male.

The use of the word “kingdom” connotes that only kings” (males) can rule and only men are welcome in the “kingdom of heaven”. Some theologians are now reimagining that word to include us all; all of us, all the members of God’s family. Thus “kingdom” is now called “kin-dom”. All our “kin” are part of God’s family.

This is how Rev. Susan Blain, Minister for Worship and Gospel Arts, Faith INFO Ministry Team, UCC, uses the term in our liturgy today. Perhaps something new will be reimagined in your idea of God’s family.

KIN-DOM WISDOM

1 Kings 3:5-12 - Psalm 119:129-136
Romans 8:26-39 - Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

CALL TO WORSHIP: *Mt 13: 31-33; 44-52*

The kin-dom of heaven is like:

A tiny mustard seed that carries the life of a tree

The kin-dom of heaven is like:

A tiny portion of yeast that makes bread rise

The kin-dom of heaven is like:

A tiny pearl of great price

that we would give all our “stuff” to have

The kin-dom of heaven is like:

A fishing boat filled with catch—good and bad together—

With fisherfolk wise to recognize the good.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Holy One, you call us to find your kin-om
already hidden in our world— in tiny, transforming
possibilities; in beauty that calls us to surrender all;
in complicated choices that call for wisdom.

Reveal yourself here in this moment and heighten our
senses that we may find you and join you in building this
kin-dom of love, and hope, and peace.

In the name of the One who calls us to seek,
Jesus, the Christ. **Amen.** (Be seated)

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 13:31-33, 4452

Parable of the mustard seed ³¹ He told another parable to
them: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that
someone took and planted in his field. ³² It’s the smallest of
all seeds. But when it’s grown, it’s the largest of all

vegetable plants. It becomes a tree so that the birds in the
sky come and nest in its branches.”

Parable of the yeast ³³ He told them another parable: “The
kingdom of heaven is like yeast, which a woman took and
hid in a bushel of wheat flour until the yeast had worked
its way through all the dough.”

Parable of the treasure ⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like a
treasure that somebody hid in a field, which someone else
found and covered up. Full of joy, the finder sold
everything and bought that field.

Parable of the merchant ⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven
is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he
found one very precious pearl, he went and sold all that he
owned and bought it.

Parable of the net ⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like
a net that people threw into the lake and gathered all
kinds of fish. ⁴⁸ When it was full, they pulled it to the shore,
where they sat down and put the good fish together into
containers. But the bad fish they threw away. ⁴⁹ That’s the
way it will be at the end of the present age. The angels will
go out and separate the evil people from the righteous
people, ⁵⁰ and will throw the evil ones into a burning
furnace. People there will be weeping and grinding their
teeth.

Treasures new and old ⁵¹ “Have you understood all these
things?” Jesus asked. They said to him, “Yes.” ⁵² Then he
said to them, “Therefore, every legal expert who has been

in the household who brings old and new things out of their treasure chest.”

SERMON: “In Search of the Kin-dom of Heaven”

Going back to the beginning of Chapter 13 in the Gospel of Matthew, the disciples ask Jesus, “Why do you use parables when you speak to the crowds?” Jesus replied, “Because they haven’t received the secrets of the kin-dom of heaven, but you have.” I find this intriguing. The last few weeks we have continued to read from Chapter 13 of the Gospel of Matthew and Jesus has continued to teach using parables. Many of these parables begin, “the kin-dom of heaven is like . . .”

This is the last Sunday we will read parables. I STILL don’t know what the kin-dom of heaven is and I want to know what secrets the disciples have that I don’t know about. Thus, I am on a quest in search of the kin-dom of heaven. (Sounds like a great mini-series on unexplained ancient mysteries, doesn’t it?)

Let’s start with what we DO know. We’ve already discussed the parables of the sower and the weeds in the wheat. Today we find something even more descriptive of the kin-dom of heaven; a more emotional response we can experience. In verses 44-46, Jesus whispers to his disciples privately two brief parables; the parables of the treasure and the parable of the pearl. In each, someone discovers something of precious and compelling value.

According to Rev. Thomas Long, “the point for both parables is that the kin-dom is like that; when people truly encounter and realize what it is, it enters their hearts, seizes their imagination, and overwhelms them with its

precious value.” That feeling sounds like a compelling experience we all might like to have.

Just imagine one thing that you don’t have presently, that you think is the most precious treasure in the world. Something worth more than any money could buy. How would you feel if you accidentally found such a treasure or even if you had searched for it for a long time and then found it?!

“So it is with the kin-dom of heaven,” writes Rev. Long. “Some people are on a quest. They are hungry for meaning, and, when the kin-dom is found, they recognize its priceless pearly gleam immediately. They have been reading widely or studying hard or asking countless questions and then, they discover the depths of the gospel. Perhaps they were raised in the church but never found it satisfying; so, they went in pursuit of something more profound, only to discover that the priceless pearl was at home all along.

“But others are not on a quest at all. They have enough to handle simply to cope with life. They are plowing or filing or cooking or tightening bolts or raising children or going to meetings. They expect nothing but the routine, anticipate no more today than a variation on yesterday. But, then, something wonderful and surprising happens. Maybe a baby is born, and the preciousness of human life as a gift from God breaks into the routine. Or maybe a line from a book or a stray remark by somebody at work breaks through the gloom and shines an unexpectedly gracious light on everything. Or maybe a phrase from an old hymn drifts across the memory like the scent of costly perfume. All at once life becomes holy, God

seems near, and everything pales before this new and breathtakingly priceless truth.” (Can I hear a WOW!?)

“Taken together, these two parables bear witness to the many ways the Spirit brings God close, to the diversity of God’s advent in our lives. However, it happens, whenever it occurs, it is the event of a lifetime. Whatever we have considered valuable before is transformed from a legacy to a means to obtain the one, unparalleled treasure of the kin-dom of heaven.”

I STILL may not completely understand what the kin-dom of heaven is, but I’m sure I would love the experience of finding true treasure in participating in God’s plan for us. In the words of theologian Fred Buechner:

“THE KINGDOM OF GOD is not a place, of course, but a condition. *Kingship* might be a better word. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done," Jesus prayed. The two are in apposition.

“Insofar as here and there, and now and then, God's kingly will is being done in various odd ways among us even at this moment, the Kingdom has come already.

“Insofar as all the odd ways we do God's will at this moment are at best half-baked and halfhearted, the Kingdom is still a long way off—a hell of a long way off, to be more Jesus is precise and theological.

“As a poet, maybe at his best in describing the feeling you get when you glimpse the Thing Itself—the kingship of the king official at last and all the world his coronation. It's like finding a million dollars in a field, he says, or a jewel worth a king's ransom. It's like finding something you hated to lose and thought you'd never find again—an old keepsake, a stray sheep, a missing child. When the Kingdom really comes, it's as if the thing you lost and thought you'd never find again is yourself.

-Originally published in *Wishful Thinking* and later in *Beyond Words*



PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

In this kin-dom where the hopeless are thrown into Lake Forgotten forever, you cast your net, drawing them into your embrace, cradling them in your heart.

In this kin-dom where folks turn anorexic gorging on greed, while the poor scratch in famine's fallow fields, you wander in, offering top dollar for the pearls of grace they uncover.

In this kin-dom where hope and faith, patience and peace have been sold as showpieces for fancy museums, you come, purchasing them back, polishing off the dust, handing them back to us so we can see the reflection of that kingdom you forged for us.

We are grateful for all you do for us, ever-loving God, picking us up out of the muck of our lives. You offer us another way to live; another kin-dom to abide and reside in. Please keep sending us your messages that a better world is possible if we would only stop, listen, and turn to you. Thank you, Ever Faithful God.

As we pray for your forgiveness and mercy, we ask you to continue your loving presence with all those affected by this pandemic; those who are sick, those

grieving lost loved ones, those who are serving in health care facilities. We pray for all those on our prayer list as another week of social distancing continues. We do our very best to help others from getting sick by wearing our masks. We can be part of the cure for this illness instead of being part of the spread of the virus.

We pray all these things in the name of the great physician, Jesus the Christ, as we pray together . . .

THE LORD'S PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come; Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR OFFERING:

Our God calls us to seek and find the hints of the Kingdom in our world, and to nurture its growth among us. We will use our gifts, tithes and offerings to rebuild the body of Christ.



PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

Grow these gifts in your love,
Bless our offerings, our hearts and our hopes in your love
To make us worthy of your work for your Kingdom
in heaven, and among us here, even now. Fill these gifts
and each of us with your goodness. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Go forth in Wisdom, in hope, in courage with hearts open to recognize the signs of the reign of God in our midst,
and courage to create more space for grace in our lives and our world. Amen.

ST. JOHN PRAYER LIST:

Tom Petroff, Barbara Moran,
Matt Brown, Rich Schmitt,
Nelson Libell, Dave Seneczyn,
Eric White, Lori Riess, Charles Chamberlin, Donna
Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley,
Carol Meyer, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess,
Shari Hamilton, Charlotte Watson, Becky Ballard.



Wayne Schlosser's correct address:

PO Box 3404

South Padre Island, TX 78597

Cell: 618-540-8390 Home: 956-299-4147

