

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, the Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast, the Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls and the Kingdom of Heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake where all sorts of fish were caught.

How many parables can Jesus get into a short space of time? When he got to the end of it, he asked the Disciples if they had understood all these things. “Yes” they said. We know later that in fact they didn’t understand at all.

Actually, I would have been very surprised if they had understood. Or is it just me who struggles with it?

It took Jesus five examples to illustrate to his Disciples exactly what the Kingdom of Heaven is. But I think it’s a good starting place because we can see how Jesus describes such small things that grow into something quite massive.

Under the sovereignty of God, tiny works, small gifts, little sacrifices weave together into something unexpected and mighty, something massive and nurturing.

Sometimes it seems that all we really have to work with are tiny seeds.

Very few people have the wealth to be philanthropists or the energy to be perpetual volunteers. When we are confronted with the cynicism and grief that there is in the world, our voices, our hope and our faith can seem very small and very frail.

When we realise the enormity of the world, even our entire lives can seem insignificant by comparison.

At our most optimistic, what can we hope to harvest from such small ingredients?

From your average mustard seed you get a small herb bush. But from a mustard seed touched by the hand of God, you get a huge tree the size of a massive oak that shades, and nurtures everything around it. That's the Kingdom of Heaven, a towering transformation of our tiniest gifts.

The Kingdom of Heaven is also like a bit of yeast that a baker took and put in his flour. The yeast worked its way into all of the flour, transforming it into bread that could feed lots and lots of families.

Interestingly, in the Jewish tradition, yeast is often an image of corruption. Its insidious ability to pervade and ferment whatever it contacted made it potentially dangerous stuff.

Yet, in a way, so is the Kingdom of Heaven. It's contagious. Even a small amount, hidden away, can transform everything around it into something far greater than anyone could have expected.

If we look at the world the way Jesus did, we will see opportunities not obligations, we will see in every lonely face a chance to bring hope, we will see in every empty heart a place that God could fill with love. Even a few people who see the world that way can completely reinvent it. Such is the Kingdom of heaven.

The next two images for the Kingdom of Heaven occur only in Matthew. They show different routes to the same destination. We have the chap who's hard at work in his boss' field. He finds a treasure trove. He immediately sold every last one of his possessions so he could buy that field and the treasure that is buried there.

I suppose, ethically or morally, one might question his methods but that is really not the point that Jesus is making.

The point is that what the farmhand found was so incredible, that nothing else mattered. He was willing to give up everything else to have it.

You see the Kingdom of Heaven may look tiny and worthless, like a mustard seed or a bit of yeast, but it's potential is so much greater than anything we could buy or acquire. It's worth surrendering everything we have or hope to have just to have the chance to bring it into the world. Such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Kingdom of Heaven is also like a merchant searching for fine pearls. He is an expert, and has gone out to look for the very best. He finds one in particular that is so perfect that he sells everything else he owns, to buy that one pearl.

Unlike our friend the farmhand, the merchant deliberately set out to find what was best. He did, and it was worth everything else he had ever found.

Some of us take the farmhand's route, stumbling into the mysterious, benevolent grace of God. Once it finds us, though, we never let go – because everything else is pale and empty by comparison.

Others of us got here as part of a deliberate journey, testing each bit of faith as though we were biting a coin to make sure it's real. But once we had found that faith, that love, we know we have come home, and all we have to do is open up our home to everyone. Such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven is also like a large net towed behind a fishing boat. Such a net catches everything, and when it's full the nets owners pull into shore and sort out the useful fish from the worthless. But we cannot dictate who is part of the Kingdom of Heaven and who is not.

The thing about all these parables is that they are about everyday life. We may not actually buy fields or pearls but hopefully, we recognise the real value of God in our faith. And, let's not forget the small things. The small things that transform into God's enormous powerful love that challenges, protects and sustains us.

I want to end with a very short story, which you may have heard before but it's always worth reminding ourselves of it again.

The man whispered, "God, speak to me,"
and a meadowlark sang. But the man did not hear.
So the man yelled, "God, speak to me,"
and thunder rolled across the sky. But the man did not listen.
The man looked around and said, "God, let me see you,"
and a star shone brightly. But he didn't notice it.

The man shouted, "God, show me a miracle,"
and a life was born, but the man was unaware.

So, the man cried out in despair, "Touch me, God, and let me know that
you are here!"

Whereupon God reached down and touched the man, but the man
brushed the butterfly away and walked on.

May our eyes be opened to see, hear and feel the kingdom of heaven
around us in the mustard seeds, the treasures, the yeast, the pearls, and
in the fish.

AMEN