



SAINT LUKE'S

“THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE...”

THE 8TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
YEAR A

1 KINGS 3:5-12
PSALM 119:129-136
ROMANS 8:26-39
MATTHEW 13:31-33, 44-52

A SERMON BY THE REV. CAROLINE STACEY

JULY 30, 2017

Two weeks ago today I was worshipping in the Abbey on Iona. For those who don't know Iona, it is a tiny island-off-an-island off the west coast of Scotland. Its story as a Christian settlement began with St Columba and his 11 companions, whose tiny boat washed up on the shores of Iona in 563. They built a monastic community of astonishing vitality. Vitality of ideas, of learning, of prayer and worship, and the arts - the famous Book of Kells was crafted on Iona. Columba's monastery was a community where a mustard seed of the kingdom germinated. From this remote island the monks spread the gospel throughout what is now northern Britain and into France. After repeated Viking raids the monastery declined until the Benedictines built another monastery on the same site in the 1200s, which in turn flourished until the Reformation the 16th century. Then in the 20th century, a new ecumenical Iona community grew up and flourishes now, working for justice, praying, worshipping and living in community.

God is a God of small beginnings and big ideas: ideas which keep springing into life even after they seem to be exhausted and spent.

Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven more than anything else. If anyone can speak directly about the kingdom of heaven, it is Jesus. Yet he is often frustratingly indirect. He reaches for one metaphor after another. Apparently, the kingdom of heaven is not just one thing. The kingdom of heaven is like many things. Things in the world we know. The examples Jesus gives are within very specific daily lives. (Something to think about - the kingdom of God can be seen within your work...). The woman is invited to look within her daily activities - yeast in the

bread. The farmer - look at how seed grows or dies. The merchant - look within your world of selling fine pearls. The fisherman - look within your world of nets and catch. These humble metaphors tell us that the kingdom of heaven is not in some far off holy place or future event. The seeds of heaven are under our noses.

But the kingdom of heaven is not obvious. It is hidden in plain sight, buried within the world we know.

Jesus identifies the key ingredient in the kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is the yeast; like the mustard seed. But it is not *only* the seed or the yeast, the kingdom is the growth that God gives it. The baker does not make the bread rise. The pearl is not made by human hands but discovered. The kingdom of heaven then, is also the power of God to grow blessing and abundance from what seems like nothing. The kingdom of heaven is God's energy, constantly converting the everyday world by love, in love, for love. God's work often remains hidden even as it comes to flower. When the bread is risen, the yeast is dispersed; when the mustard seed becomes a shrub, the seed it came from is underground. God's energy rarely stays put for long. We might call the coming of the kingdom of heaven a movement.

Jesus' homely metaphors also point to the vulnerability of God's work. God's kingdom doesn't come in like a regime change, and God's kingdom is not inevitable. The kingdom is affected by human choices and prevailing conditions. We can hinder God's work. We can eat the mustard seed rather than plant it, we can burn the bread, we can sell

the field. We can trample on God's love and God's gifts. And yet God's love never gives up. And eventually, the kingdom will come in fullness into this world.

I wonder about what God is up to in our own time. I wonder about the marginalization of religion in the secular worldview. I wonder if God is stripping the strength of the once mighty mainline churches to help us all become more faithful, even to become one Church, as Jesus prays in John 17. I wonder if God is reducing us to a mustard seed for greater faithfulness. I wonder if Iona, with its mighty risings and fallow times and rising again, is a metaphor for how God usually does his Kingdom-work.

Jesus helps us to see God's kingdom coming in the meantime. To see as Jesus sees, we can start by looking into our lives right now. Our lives contain many seeds of heaven. Where are they in your life? I know they are there. I can only point to a couple of examples of many where I can see them in my own life. Last summer, I watched my nephew Peter, who is 8, enter a hay field one evening on our family's farm in England. He didn't know anyone was watching. The hay was cut and lay in rows in the field. The sun was starting to fade and the light was golden. Peter spread his arms wide in joy and ran from one end of the field to the other. The kingdom of heaven is like the pure joy of a child running through a field on a summer evening. Or, very different - the kingdom of heaven is like...this week, people rising up against the latest discrimination against trans people, serving their country in the

military. The kingdom of heaven is always seen in those working for justice and equal dignity. There are many and varied seeds of the kingdom, but with the eyes of faith we know they all come from the hand of a God who sows abundantly.

Our lives have holiness in them. We won't find God anywhere unless we can start by finding God somewhere. As we notice the seeds of the kingdom within our own daily life, we may start to see them everywhere - and perhaps even in everyone.

Amen

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