

2026 07 26 WORSHIP AT HOME

Dear friends,

I do hope that you have managed to cope reasonably well with the heat of the past few weeks – I expect that, like me, you are grateful that the temperatures seem a little more manageable now. Today we have a cluster of small parables from Matthew about the kingdom of heaven: two pairs of short parables and a fifth using an image from fishing. We explore miraculous growth; what is precious; the joy of discovery. As always, I wish you every blessing. Margaret

Call to worship:

Come, bring your mustard seed of hope, bring your yeast of expectation and your treasure of thanksgiving.

Bring the pearls that are your prayers and bring the net of your lives.

Come, you who are called – you who are justified – you who are glorified.

Come, for it is the Lord Jesus who calls you.

Gracious God, we cast out the nets of our worship into the sea of your Holy Spirit, that we might draw in your gifts of joy, peace, patience, kindness, thankfulness and love, and so become more fully your people to your glory. Amen.

Jesus of parable and prayer, grant us:

the courage of the mustard seed, that we might not be overwhelmed by our smallness;

the patience of yeast, that we might not try to rush that which needs time;

the vision of the man in the field, that we might recognise treasure when we unearth it;

the wisdom of the merchant, that we might give all that we have for that which is truly precious;

the strength of the net, that we might bear all things in life and not be torn.

And may your kingdom come. Amen.

The words to 'Here is love vast as the ocean' - *after William Rees*

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1 Here is love vast as the ocean, loving kindness as the flood,
when the Prince of Life, our ransom, shed for us his precious blood.
Who his love will not remember; who can cease to sing his praise?
He can never be forgotten throughout heaven's eternal days.

2 On the mount of crucifixion fountains opened deep and wide;
through the floodgates of God's mercy flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers poured incessant from above;
and heaven's peace and perfect justice kissed a guilty world in love.

Prayer:

We praise you, Lord Jesus, for the richness of the parables that root our faith in the ordinary and yet transform it.

Increase in us a sense of wonder, that we might see signs of your kingdom wherever we are.

Bless us with the words to tell new stories of your love and grace to all we meet.

We pray in your name. Amen.

Forgive us, loving God, when we stop looking for treasure and give up reading your word.
Forgive us when we give up the yeast of our faith and our lives go flat.
Forgive us when we don't cast out our nets, but stay on shore, complacent and unenthusiastic.
Forgive us – inspire us – renew us in Jesus' name. Amen.

Jesus' death on the cross was love in action.
A redeeming love that untangled us from all sin and washed us clean.
Through him we are forgiven and free. Amen.

Lord, help me not to grow stale, but grant me the gift of expectancy, that as I dig in the field of Scripture, I may find the treasure of your life-giving word and be filled with joy. Then may I live out my life with my energy renewed and my heart re-awakened. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 13: 31-33 and 44-52 taken from The Holy Bible New Living Translation, British Text, copyright 2000 Tyndale Charitable Trust

Here is an illustration Jesus used: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants and grows into a tree where birds can come and find shelter in its branches.'

He also said this: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast used by a woman making bread. Even though she used a large amount of flour the yeast permeated every part of the dough.'

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field – and to get the treasure too!

Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a pearl merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!

Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a fishing net that is thrown into the water and gathers fish of every kind. When the net is full, they drag it up onto the shore, sit down, sort the good fish into crates, and throw the bad ones away. That is the way it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked people from the godly, throwing the wicked into the fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Do you understand?

'Yes,' they said, 'we do.'

Then he added: 'Every teacher of religious law who has become a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a person who brings out of the storehouse the new teachings as well as the old.'

Comment:

A cluster of short parables today, each about the Kingdom of Heaven.

The first uses exaggerated language, because while the mustard seed might be the small it is not the smallest, and it hardly grows into a tree. The likeness to the kingdom is not so much with the

smallness of the seed but with the transformation into what it becomes: a huge shrub, several feet high in Galilee. It is an image of growth.

The second parable, about yeast, also uses an exaggerated image. The amount of dough that the woman produces is way beyond normal domestic needs. [3 measures is about 25kg, enough for up to 150 people]. Again, the image is of growth – this time secret growth – for the smallest speck of yeast, if left overnight in a covered bowl, will leaven enough dough to feed a village. This is how the kingdom develops: from the smallest beginnings but with miraculous growth.

In a society without banks, burying possessions was the best way to keep them safe. Someone who chances on a hoard is filled with joy, but the hoard is of such surpassing value that he uses everything he has to buy the field and gain possession of the treasure. Similarly, a businessman dealing in pearls that are found in the Mediterranean will give up everything to gain the one pearl that outstrips in value all the others put together. Such are the joys of finding the kingdom of heaven.

The final parable is of a dragnet that is taken out to sea by boat and hauled onto the shore with ropes, a common practice for some of Jesus' followers on the Sea of Galilee. However, not all the fish can be consumed. According to Leviticus 11, only fish with scales and fins can be eaten by a Jew. Fish such as eels, and any shellfish are not kosher and must be rejected. The dominant idea is of separation at the end – just as it was with the wheat and the weeds.

So, the themes in the Gospel reading are: miraculous growth from small beginnings; the surpassing value of the kingdom; and the separation of the righteous from the rest at the end.

Meditation of Martha, sister of Mary – The Most Amazing Man year A – copyright 2010 Nick Fawcett. Followed by prayer from the same source.

I could relate to that parable of his, for I've made bread more times than I can remember, and it's amazing the difference a little yeast makes to a loaf. That, and that alone, causes it to rise.

I make *unleavened* bread as well, of course, eaten at our Passover meal: a reminder of how our people hurried from captivity in search of the Promised Land – no time for yeast, no time for anything.

And it seemed to me that Jesus was drawing a comparison between that kingdom and his. For the kingdom of heaven is here amongst us, taking shape day by day.

There's no rush to complete it, to escape from this world. It's a reality we must help to build, serving as yeast to help it grow.

Yes, its fulfilment lies in another place and time, but if we see it as only there then we'll fail to see it all – for it's also about love, service, commitment, compassion, here, today, on earth.

The old way is past – the new has come. His love has set us free.

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Sovereign God, though we look forward to a new heaven and earth – a kingdom that is yet to come – save us from turning our back on the present, as though the here and now isn't important – as if the world around us isn't our concern.

Save us from washing our hands of social and environmental responsibility or of loving our neighbour, both near and far; or of working out our faith in daily life or of testifying to your love in word and deed.

Teach us that if we would truly enter your kingdom, we must strive each day to bring it closer, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen

May God bless each of us as we go into the coming week. May we seek his glory in all we do. Amen.