

“What is your price?” Mt 13:31-33, 44-52

He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. “Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

This week we continue to go through Jesus’ parables as recorded in the gospel according Matthew, chapter thirteen. Today in our Gospel reading we had five parables of the Kingdom of heaven, or the Kingdom parables as they are usually called.

The parable of a mustard seed, the parable of leaven, the parable of a man who bought the field, and the parable of a merchant who bought a pearl, and the parable of a net. Today we’ll focus on first four of these parable.

Let’s begin with ‘mustard seed’ and ‘leaven’. What are they about? Of course, it’s easy - about the Kingdom of heaven. But, wait, what is this Kingdom of heaven? Parables won’t help us to understand what Jesus is trying to tell us about this Kingdom, if we don’t even know what this Kingdom is.

This is important. Language can be and often is confusing. And we want to communicate our message as clearly as possible. So what is this Kingdom of God? It is us. The Kingdom of God is all God’s chosen people, chosen before the creation of the world, called and gathered together under one King, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This is the everlasting Kingdom that was prophesized already in the Old Testament times by Samuel, Daniel and others. This is the Kingdom which will surpass all kingdoms, and which will remain forever.

When we think about the word 'kingdom', we may have in mind a geographical territory. This is not a case with the Kingdom of God. This is more about active reign of God. About the ultimate authority.

About the universal reign of Jesus. His reign has begun, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus, He is the King and we have been invited to share His kingdom with Him.

So where is this Kingdom of God? Good question. Where His chosen people live according to the laws of His Kingdom. Where we live having Jesus as the highest authority. How is that? When we live not using others for our benefit, but serving others with all our gifts and resources.

When we turn greed into generosity, self-promotion and arrogance into humility and forgiveness. When instead of restlessness we live in peace. When offended we reply with a prayer, looking to please not men, but the Lord.

It is not always easy. Actually most of the time it is pretty hard, but these are the laws of our Kingdom, and whenever we try to keep them, our hearts rejoice... as do angels in God's presence.

Now, back to the parables. It is important to notice how Jesus begun these parables. The kingdom of heaven IS like.. IS like. Not 'will be like', but is like. What Jesus is telling us is what His Kingdom, His reign looks like these days.

And, honestly, it looks embarrassing. Would you agree? Do you see much of splendor of His so called reign? Is His Kingdom really superior that all others? Honestly? Can you see that this Kingdom in the ultimate Kingdom, that this King, Jesus Christ, is the one to whom all knees will bow?

I don't know about you, but I don't see it. I can't see it. And people in Jesus time couldn't see it either. They had been waiting for this Kingdom to be established for centuries and millennia.

Now, this man, Jesus Christ, He claimed to be the promised Messiah. OK, but when are you going to establish your Kingdom? When will we receive our seats of honor in your Kingdom? When will you drive away all our enemies? When will finally our cause triumph?

Jesus disciples were confused, as were many hundreds and thousands of those who witnessed miracles done by Jesus. When are you going to establish you Kingdom, so that we can see it? First two parables contains Jesus answers to our questions.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

A mustard seed really is small. This is how the Kingdom of Heaven looks like now. Small. Look at us! We are the Kingdom of heaven. Can you see the greatness of this Kingdom with your eyes? Can you see it here? No, of course not. We are like a mustard seed. Small, the smallest among the seeds.

But... and here Jesus gives us a glimpse of the future glory - when this seed has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree. Here Jesus exaggerates a lot. None of mustard seeds actually grow that big.

What Jesus is telling is that when the Kingdom of heaven will be revealed in its glory, it will be such a surprise for us, for it will be much, much better, much, much greater than we could ever imagine. This is where we are heading. To the reality that exceeds all our dreams.

The same point Jesus drives home with the next parable, the parable of leaven.

“The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

Leaven, - you can't see it. But it transforms everything. In this case Jesus mentions three measures of flour which is approximately 40 liters. That's quite an amount. The point is that the Kingdom of heaven will take over everything.

Now it is hidden. Of course, and sometimes we may experience things which beg a question, - is God really in control? Is Jesus really reigning? But when the time comes, the glory of the Kingdom of God will be revealed in its fullness.

We may be little now, but we are the Kingdom of Heaven, and our King has got the ultimate authority, even over death, and no one can snatch us from His hands.

Then Jesus went on telling two more parables. **“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”**

What are they about? Of course, about the Kingdom of Heaven. As it is now. As it is today. The key question we need to ask in relation with these two parables is this – who is this man who bought the field, and who is this merchant who bought the pearl?

Often we can hear interpretations were we, namely, Christians are those who have find Jesus as our Savior, and then we give up everything just to have Him. We sell all that we have and buy the field or buy the pearl, so to speak.

I wish we could say it about us. I wish we could really say it about us. It would be us truly fulfilling the first commandment. Loving our God with all our heart and mind and strength.

Organizing our lives, all dimensions of our lives in a way that we can honor God the Father and with our lives serve Him by serving others with all that we have and with all what we are. Wouldn't it be beautiful? It would.

But we don't live in dreams we live in reality. In this reality people are not looking for God. People don't want to let God be God. They want to be gods themselves. If you have the only true God, if you live in His kingdom, if He is your King, then you are supposed to live according to the laws of His kingdom.

Then you belong to Him. We don't have this kind of practice in Lutheran tradition, but there are Christians who believe that they actually chose Christ. And to do it they come before the congregation and confess that they give up their lives to Christ. 'I'm yours. Take me and use me as you seem it fitting. I'm yours.'

Just imagine, if we were asked to give ourselves to Christ, to follow Him. To entrust ourselves and all that we have to Him. Listening to Him carefully and doing everything to make Him proud.

Are we ready to say – I'm your. I give myself into your hands. Send me! Think about it. It's a hard questions. Isn't our commitment to Christ often more like this? 'Yes, Lord, we are happy to listen to you, but.. you know, there are a few things that we would like to keep for ourselves.

When it comes to how we go about OUR lives, about how we build OUR relationships, how we treat others, we want to do it our way. When it comes to what we do with OUR possession, we want to do it our way.

When it comes to OUR time, OUR 6 days and 22 hours, we really want to retain control over them. Sure, Lord, we are happy to allow you to solve our problems, but don't expect us to listen to you too often, and don't try to make OUR private lives your business. What belongs to us, belongs to us.

And as the surrounding culture tries to undermine everything that our Lord teaches and demands from His disciples, we are giving up more and more. We are happy if only someone still come to the service, we don't anymore expect people to live as citizens of God's Kingdom. And so our light grows dark, and our salt becomes useless.

We are not the ones who sell everything and buy the field, or sell everything and buy the pearl. No. We don't want to do it, and we even can't do it. That's why we have a different role in these parables. We are this treasure in the field and we are this pearl. Yes, that what we are.

But who then is this man, this merchant? Who could so desperately desire spoiled goods such as us? This man who sold everything, this merchant who sold all that he had to obtain us, - is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Not we chose Him, but He gave up everything to purchase us.

Literary. As apostle Paul puts it: "Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Phi 2:6-8 ESV)

Let me ask, do you know your price? Knowing how unworthy we are. Do you know how valuable you are in God's eyes? Do you know how much Jesus, the Son of God is ready to give up for you? In these two parables Jesus reveals it.

You are priceless in God's eyes. You are infinitely valuable for Him. Jesus gave up everything so that only He could obtain you. This is how God sees you, despite of what our lives look like. Now you belong to Him. He has purchased you. Not with silver or gold, but with His holy, innocent and precious blood.

This is what the Kingdom of God is like. God the Father loving us, unworthy and selfish sinners, loving you more than you could ever imagine. Giving up everything so that He only can have you as His children. Us, who can't even appreciate it.

This is what the Kingdom of God is like. God's love to you. God who comes to take us to Himself so that you could live in eternal peace and joy. He pays the price, you receive the gift.

Now, when you know it, we can only pray that the Holy Spirit would help us to live as who we truly are, - God's children and heirs of His Kingdom, chosen for eternal life. Let's do our best to make our Father proud.

Amen.