

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 7, 2014
13th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Samuel 16:1-13 Acts 19:23-40

Hymns: 44; 462; 465; 52 (23:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 13:31-33

31 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, 32 which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." 33 Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Kingdom Expectations.

Jesus taught many parables about the kingdom of God, perhaps more than regarding anything else. It was His desire that the people, especially His disciples, would come to a better understanding of the Kingdom of God, or, as the Lord also called it, the kingdom of heaven. It becomes clear that Jesus was attempting to convey an understanding of the spiritual nature of the Kingdom of God rather than having people look for something temporal, even worldly. This was an area of spiritual understanding where the disciples continued to struggle right up to the day of Jesus' ascension into heaven. It is easy for us to be critical of the disciples for their slowness in understanding Jesus' lessons about the kingdom because they held on so tightly to the idea of a worldly

kingdom in which Jesus would rule over a modern Israel, and free the Jews from the dominion of Rome. That idea may even seem silly to many of us now (even though there are some within the visible Christian church who still look for such a kingdom in spite of the scriptures clearly teaching otherwise.).

However, we still show the weakness of our flesh and our human reasoning when we consider the Kingdom work which the Lord has set before us. We are still inclined to start with the ideas of institutions and numbers and buildings and programs, and organizations. So it is good for us to consider a couple of Jesus' parables presenting God's truth about the Kingdom, that we might better understand --

THEME: The Kingdom's Growth in the World.

Jesus would have us recall the Kingdom's --

I. Humble Beginnings -- Like a Mustard Seed.

Matthew 13:31 "Another parable He put forth to them, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, 32 which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.' "

The Lord's way of bringing the kingdom into this world was not with a production that all the world got to see. It was a quiet. Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem of Judea. Oh yes, the angel choir did sing, but to a small and humble audience, the shepherds out in the fields who were keeping watch over their flock at night. They came and worshiped Jesus as their Redeemer King on that cold and starry night. Really, who would have thought that this little Baby born in a humble stall was in fact the greatest King ever to be born in this world? Who would have thought that this boy growing up in the home of a tradesman, and becoming a tradesman Himself was the wisest of all people to be born in the world? Who would have thought that His words were the words of eternal life? Who would have thought that this Jesus when He was taken captive and was so sorely abused and beaten, and finally crucified, -- who would have thought He was a great King? There was one who turned to Jesus while He languished on the cross and asked to be remembered as Jesus entered His kingdom, but that one was a condemned malefactor himself. What would he know about the Kingdom of God?

In all this Jesus was that little mustard seed, a small seed being planted into the ground even as He was buried in that rich man's grave. A small

seed that sprouted and grew into the Kingdom of God as thousands in Jerusalem came to faith in Him as Redeemer and Lord just fifty days later. That was the beginning, but the Kingdom continued to grow. From that humble beginning it grew larger and ever larger, sending out its branches so that it reached to the ends of the world. That small mustard seed beginning has extended its branches to envelope us today, here in the United States. Indeed, the Kingdom of God has extended its reach to the very ends of the earth. This has come to pass not by violence, or by the political maneuvers of scheming men plying their money and influence to gain their ends. It was done with the message of the cross, the message of a Savior who died and rose again that we might have life in His name. The Kingdom of our Lord has risen to great heights, and it shall endure forever, and the gates of hell shall prevail against it. All from such lowly beginnings that many are offended by Jesus and turn away.

No, the Kingdom of God is not like the show business productions of this world. In the second parable before us this morning Jesus teaches us of the Kingdom's –

II. Quiet Growth – Like Leaven in a Lump of Dough.

Matthew 13:33 “Another parable He spoke to them: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened.’ ”

Yeast is an interesting substance. It has its own way of working with its fermenting bubbles. It doesn't make a great deal of noise. One could sprinkle just a little yeast in one's batter as one mixes the flour to make dough, and at first not observe much of anything happening. But walk away and that leaven works. Even if the yeast was contained to only one portion of the dough, it will work its way, quietly, but most surely through the entire bowl of dough. It is easy to start that yeast working in the dough and forget about it, it's that quiet, but if one does forget to check on the dough, one will find it expanding right out of the bowl. You can punch it down and work with it, and break it into lumps and give it a little time, those lumps of dough grow into loaves. It is so quiet, and yet so sure.

And that is like the Kingdom of God. The gospel is that leaven. When we spread the good news of Jesus Christ we are putting the yeast in dough. We may walk away thinking very little was done. It was just a small thing, a few words that were shared with another person. Indeed we may be convinced that nothing could come of it at all. Jesus is telling us something different. The leaven of the gospel will work when it is put out

in the world. The Spirit gives it power. The Holy Spirit works through the means of grace, the gospel in word and sacrament. The Lord has entrusted this gospel to us and charged us with a great commission, to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature! That is in fact how we became citizens in the Kingdom of God. It is in fact **the only way that the Kingdom grows**. And just as surely as the yeast works through the whole lump of dough to make it rise, so the gospel works in the world to enlarge the Kingdom of our Lord.

Remember, the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of His grace. He rules hearts and lives not by the threat of the law, but by the grace of the gospel. He loved us, and that love which has come to us in Christ has taken hold of our hearts so that we love God and our neighbor.

These lessons about the nature of the kingdom are important for us to grasp and hold onto. Many today have fallen into the notion that the church is about social justice, and social activism. We need to get out there and feed the poor, and fight for the downtrodden, and speak out against tyranny, and seek equal justice for all. These are all good things which Christians, in loving concern for their neighbors in the world, will address. However that is not what the Kingdom of God is about. And that is not how the Kingdom of God grows. The Kingdom of God is not increased by taking community polls to find out which programs are most desired in a community, and then organize a church to provide those services. In fact, that detracts from the gospel. It steals glory from the gospel. It declares the gospel to be weak and incapable of redirecting lives, and changing hearts. As a result more and more people care less and less about the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's not at the top of the list when looking for church.

Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer "Thy Kingdom come." What Luther taught us captures Jesus' lesson very well. Luther explained, "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and live a godly life here in time and hereafter in eternity."

May this be both our prayer, and our confidence concerning the God's kingdom that it also come to us.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.