

Surprises of the Kingdom

by Rev Jane Kraft

Matthew 13v31-33, 44-52

Matthew Chapter 13 records some of the parables which Jesus used, to teach his followers about the Kingdom of God, and as we listen and learn we are drawn into viewing the world differently. At the beginning of the chapter we heard about the sower, we learnt about God's extravagant generosity. Then with the story of the wheat and the weeds we encountered God's patience and care. Today we are brought to see the Kingdom is a treasure of priceless beauty which grows in an amazing way and brings with it joy and delight.

In the verses we heard read today from Matthew 13, Jesus again draws on very ordinary objects to illustrate profound truths. The parables he used are both familiar, and surprising in the perspective they give to our understanding.

Familiar, because the objects are everyday items, and surprising because within these items we are drawn into an understanding of the wonder of God, and we learn that from small beginnings the Kingdom of God can grow into something very significant.

Have you noticed that small things can make a huge difference?
You only have to introduce a tiny baby into a household to see that.

We may think that the Kingdom of Heaven will come in a spectacular and powerful way but Jesus reveals that the Kingdom is already here, like a small mustard seed in the ground or a little bit of yeast in a lump of dough.

I don't know if you watched the news on Friday and saw Captain Tom receive his knighthood from the Queen. A small challenge to walk 100 laps of his garden to raise a small amount to help the NHS, grew, the task remained the

same 100 laps before his hundredth birthday, but the result was a huge, and a totally unexpected surprise.

Most of us, live our lives in obscurity, and for the majority of us, the call to follow Christ is to witness in small seemingly minor ways. Often, we do not know how we have worked for the kingdom, as we quietly witness to God's love in inconspicuous acts of service. Sometimes it is just a smile or a kind word or action which transforms someone's day and, in that instant, they encounter the love of Christ. There have been many such actions over the last few months.

Some years ago, my husband and I were travelling through the Arabian desert when the driver of our four-wheel drive jeep stopped. Whichever direction you looked there was nothing to be seen but sand. We were told to get out. And walk a few yards away from the jeep. Now lie down our driver said. No, it was not a robbery or bandits, but the prelude to one of the most memorable sights I have ever witnessed. As I lay there on my back, miles from anywhere, I was able to see above me in the night sky thousands and thousands of stars. Stars, which are always there but we just can't see them because of the light pollution which is part of our modern lives in the urban environment in which we live.

In a similar way material things and everyday situations can get in the way of our Going Deeper into God. God is always there. He does not change; it is our attitudes and way of living which mask our perception of him.

Sometimes it is good to stop and be still and ponder what things in our lives are masking the presence of God and preventing us seeing the hidden treasure of the Kingdom.

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" but we can glimpse it around us when compassion and love are shown to others. As Rosaline Brown so

succinctly puts it “We worship a God whose idea of Kingship is being involved in compassionate action.”

There are truths about the kingdom which we can draw from today’s Gospel. We learn, that the kingdom grows slowly and sometimes imperceptibly. Like a seed germinating unseen in the soil, and suddenly we are surprised by the new green shoot sprouting up.

It’s the same with the yeast working inside the dough, given the right conditions it rises but this happens gradually. Leave it in a warm place and on your return the dough has surprisingly doubled in size.

Natural pearls are formed unseen in the oyster over a considerable time. Prise open oyster shells and there inside are, as expected oysters but just occasionally you are surprised by the sight of a pearl.

I was reading a passage of scripture the other day It was a familiar passage which I had read many times before but as I pondered, half a sentence leapt out at me from the page. The words prompted a notion which I had never considered before and deeper thought on this surprised me and I wondered why had I never spotted this?

Each day God has something new and wonderful to reveal to us. In the ordinary we can encounter and be surprised by the extraordinary wonders of God and of his Kingdom all around us and within us. We look and pray for the coming of the Kingdom, which is fruitful, generous, and patient. And so rejoice in this priceless treasure which is ours if we are willing to look for it.