

Date: July 17, 2022

Texts: Is. 55. 1-7 / Matt. 13. 33, 44-52

Title: "The Kingdom of Heaven Is Like... a Treasure"

Intro -

cable news shows, like CNN and Fox, are - I have found,
through visits to aging parents - rather free and easy with
the "Breaking News" banner that gets splashed across
the screen, or - runs constantly at the bottom
cf. - Back in the old days of TV or radio broadcast news, "breaking news" meant
a brand-new story so important it was worth interrupting
other programming.

Now, in the cable-news era, the words "breaking news" pop up
at regular intervals, several times an hour.

(personally, it seems on more than one occasion -

I recall hearing the news that broke at least four times that day)
and - then...

there's the breaking news that could have used a little more
editorial oversight:

- Something Went Wrong in Jet Crash, Expert Says
- Miners Refuse to Work after Death
- War Dims Hope for Peace
- Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges
- New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group

which might explain this comment from H. L. Mencken:

"A newspaper is a device for making the ignorant more ignorant
and the crazy - crazier."

we can easily translate that to any of the various platforms that
bring us our news these days...

by way of contrast, consider... -

- the news that Jesus breaks is astonishing and incredibly good news.

In fact, this is the way the announcement is framed in the gospels.

~ Breaking news: Good news! The kingdom of God is upon us!

The kingdom of God is within you!

Or, as John the Baptist would write the banner:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near”

I) Breaking News!

cf. - It's fair to say that most people — after hearing breaking news — want details....

- we have an insatiable thirst for more information, more background or more understanding.

and so - we stay tuned to our TV, or consult online sites regularly.

- We want to know more.

i.e. - how strong is that red tape... will it hold my car, much less a truck...?

if miners were willing to work after death,

would you still have to pay them...?

and... what exactly are the qualifications for being an expert, when it comes to plane crashes...?

well...

the good news here is that Jesus gives us the details

(not necessarily having anything to do with

red tape and bridges, but...)

He provides context.

He tries to give the disciples understanding and insight.

The kingdom of God has broken into history.

It shatters everything!

What does this incredible, amazing and daring action mean?

cf. - Jesus explains with parables and metaphors.

- the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed...
- or, try this: it's like yeast
- or, here's another of looking at it: it's like a treasure in a field
- it's also like a priceless pearl
- and finally, let's think "fishing net..."

solid headlines - all of them...

grabbed the attentions of 1c listeners (who, admittedly, had
an attention span way longer than ours...)

but - do we have to wait until 11:00 for the details?

No.

Jesus gave them to the disciples right then, and -
we are the beneficiaries of this

so... no need to wait until 11:00...

let's get at those details...

that breaking news...

about the kingdom of heaven, and -

what exactly it's like - now

II) Details

let's start with the mustard seed -

so small that, in the sowing of it, it's almost invisible.

Yet from this virtually invisible seed, a huge shrub develops,

large enough for birds, and more...

cf. - as an good image of the kingdom of God.

Its power is so great that no matter how small the work,
no matter how small the seed that is sown...

it results in something great and amazing.

relate - some commentators believe that the reference to the birds

speaks to the nature of the kingdom as a hospitable place

where all can find shelter and rest...

connect this with the parable of the wheat last week - and we find
affirmation for the image that the kingdom of God is not a thorny shrub
where little birds are pierced, uncomfortable,
judged and unwelcome.

rather - it is "home..."

cf. - the meaning of the yeast is similar to the previous one -

That which is small, virtually invisible, yields an astounding product
- much larger than itself.

In this case, the emphasis is not on *external* material growth,
but something that is happening *inwardly*...

- the leaven works *within* the dough.

here - Jesus is driving home another principle about the kingdom of God.

- It unerringly penetrates, permeates and pervades the
neighborhood, culture and world into which it has been introduced.

Dough without yeast is heavy, thick, inert and tasteless, but...

dough into which leaven has been introduced is
completely different.

this gives us bread... sweet rolls... croissants... and more

(but - back to the kingdom...)

- the kingdom of God is a changing agent;

it causes expansion, development, movement, a metamorphosis.

so -

what's your image of the kingdom of heaven...?

cf. - Jesus continues:

the kingdom is like a treasure... like a priceless pearl...

note - both of these are little vignettes that would have been
familiar to the people of the day

i.e. - It was not uncommon in the first century A.D. for someone who had
something quite valuable to bury the precious item in
his backyard or field.

- The object was thereby protected from marauders and thieves.
relate per the parable of the talents - two servants put the money to work...
the third buries it in the ground.

Jesus' parable in our text supposes that someone has found a
treasure in a field accidentally.

and - apparently - this field is like that bank account you forgot
you had...

What is this someone going to do?

He buys the field so he can legally claim the treasure that's there.

as for the pearl -

the main character is a wealthy pearl merchant.

Pearls were so desired in that culture that they were actually
valued more highly than gold.

Thus, with no hesitation, the merchant sells all his other jewels
to buy this one, priceless pearl...

i.e. - Breaking news! The kingdom of God is more precious than
anything in this world.

- Give up everything to possess the kingdom!

Jesus seems to imply here a sort of "hidden" quality to the kingdom of God.

The treasure is buried... the pearl is sequestered within the shell...

Still, some people stumble upon the kingdom of God anyway,
even if accidentally.

Some are searching for it and find it.

But in any case, once discovered, you divest yourself of anything
that would deny complete possession of this incredible
treasure... this priceless pearl...

and then, finally, we have the fishing net...

cf. - for the people living in Jesus' time - this parable contained the
"very good news" that - while they were currently
under Roman rule...

a day was coming when the kingdom of God... the kingdom of heaven...
would ultimately triumph

- the details here are that the kingdom of God is not just a present,
spiritual reality, but also an inevitable future physical reality.

This eschatological dimension of the kingdom reminds us that the
tares will someday be separated from the wheat (13:24-30);
someday the “bad” fish will be separated from the good (v. 38)...

cf. - as good news for these people...
just as it is for us

i.e. - For many people today, the times in which we live are
confusing and disjointed...

We are confronted with so many ways of thinking.

Evil and unrighteousness are all around us.

We are often beleaguered and “hunkering in the bunker” of
despair and uncertainty.

but the message of the nets reminds us to step out into the light of
the certain victory and triumph of righteousness.

Breaking news...!

We can leave all of this in the hands of God and go back to being the church,
being a mustard seed, being the yeast in the loaf...

and - in the best tradition of TV announcements -
“but wait! there’s more...!”

Jesus asks, “Have you understood all this?”

the disciples answered: “yes... we have...”

okay then...

Jesus says to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for
the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who
brings out of his treasure, what is new... and what is old.”

bring out the best china... put your treasure on display...

we do not - and, should not - hide our light under a bushel
rather - we are agents of a new kingdom...

we have been given a special responsibility...

... we have been gifted with a seed...

- the seed of a dream...

a hope...

a new possibility

what is the seed that is your gift...?

what can you do to nurture it...? to help it grow...?

write that down...

and - as with previous weeks -

place it in the offering as a prayer for those seeds to grow