

Reflection

This week has Jesus giving what might be called a "rapid fire" parable feast. The kingdom of heaven is like . . . a mustard seed, yeast, hidden treasure, fine pearls, and a net full of fish. In other words, the kingdom of heaven is hidden, yet glorious; unexpected, yet all-encompassing; unseen, but always present.

The first hearers of the parables would have laughed out loud at the thought of allowing mustard weed to grow and birds to nest in it. And, we think we understand the use of yeast as comparison for the hidden kingdom, but this was work kept only for women. To use "woman's work" as an example for the kingdom of heaven would have been laughable at the least and riot-producing at the most. We could go on evaluating each parable and the ways in which each is quite shocking. Like the one who finds a treasure in someone else's field, then hides it and buys the field - shocking! Are the lectionary creators trying to tell us something about being shocking this week?

The Genesis passage is that crazy story of Laban tricking the trickster, Jacob, into "going in to" Leah, his eldest daughter instead of Rachel, the younger daughter whom Jacob loved. Is it a story about perseverance, Jacob working seven additional years, making a total of fourteen waiting for the love of his life to be presented to him? Is it a story that should create in us dis-ease about how women were (and are) treated like property? Is it a story about justice where Jacob finally feels the pain of his own brother, Esau, and his father after tricking them out of the birthright that was not rightfully his?

And, what about Paul's letter to the Romans? Is there anything shocking to be found in this text? How about that part that says "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Really? Are we really supposed to believe that all things work for good despite all the evidence to the contrary?

The ending of the Romans text is that beautiful passage about nothing being able to separate us from the love of God. No question is off limits. No shocking detail is too much. No amount of trickery keeps us from the kingdom of heaven indefinitely. As Christians, we must be able to see what is hidden among us. We must be willing to share the shocking details of God's kingdom that is here and now. In so doing, we point others toward the shocking kingdom of heaven and do our part to reveal it on the earth. *(Source Miriam's Tambourine, MTS)*

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Genesis 29:15-28 Then Laban said to Jacob, 'Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?' Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?"

Laban said, "This is not done in our country - giving the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.



Psalm 105: 1-11, 45b

O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually.

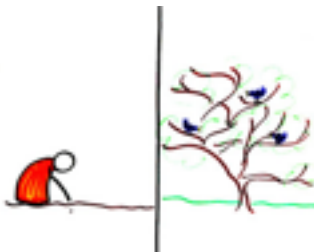
Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered, O offspring of his servant Abraham, children of Jacob, his chosen ones. He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth.

He is mindful of his covenant forever, of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance." Praise the LORD!

Romans 8: 26-39

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52



He put before them a parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs 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 yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."



"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; 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; on finding one pearl of great value, he 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 caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out 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 furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

"Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." And he said 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."