

Title: The Hidden Treasures of God's Kingdom

Subtitle: Looking for spiritual treasures amid life's difficulties

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/pBd5N0ku7z8>

Today's Gospel covers five short parables that glisten like gems, displayed for those who have ears to hear. Each parable, in different ways, pictures the hiddenness of God's kingdom and how surprisingly it grows against all odds.

The first two parables about a mustard seed and yeast hidden in a batch of dough are concerned with the kingdom's growth from seemingly modest and insignificant beginnings. The following two parables about a treasure hidden in a field and a pearl of great price focus on the infinite value of God's kingdom. The fifth parable, about a fishing net, pictures how the bad and the good will finally be separated at the last judgment. The first two pairs of parables will be the major focus of today's message.

The apparent smallness and hiddenness of God's kingdom is a theme that resurfaces throughout salvation history. In our Old Testament lesson, Solomon saw himself ***“as only a little child, who did not know how to go out or come in.”***¹ Because of his humble perception of himself, he asked God for a wise and discerning heart. His request was abundantly granted, along with riches and honor. His fame grew so much that no one would be his equal in wisdom or compare with his greatness. The story is just one example of how growth from small beginnings works in God's kingdom.

The parable about yeast hidden in a batch of dough fascinates me because yeast symbolizes sin and evil throughout the Old and New Testaments. What makes this confusing is that in this incidence yeast has a positive result because it causes growth. Yet, on the other hand, it could also mean that the kingdom is growing

¹ 1 Kings 3:7

and expanding amid a world spoiled by sin. Paul alludes to this in our New Testament lesson from Romans when he explains that ***“God works all things together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose.”***² This verse does not say that all things are good, which happens to us. But God works all things together for the good of those who love him.

The clearest example of this comes from Joseph’s life in the book of Genesis. When he confronted his brother about what they had done in selling him into slavery, he said to them, ***“You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”***³ Ultimately, this meant that God’s plan for Joseph included the fiery trial he had to endure.

Paul expounds on this idea when he talks about the suffering of this present time, which causes all of us, including creation, to sigh and groan.⁴ The groaning Paul refers to comes from an inner longing for things to be as they were meant to be.

The Spirit, who Jesus said would come alongside us, is now working in our souls, but like yeast that works in a batch of dough, it can seem confusing and messy, nor is it pleasant. Sometimes it may come about as God disturbs you in your sleep. It may take a while for God to get your attention, but if we are patient, the Spirit within us, like the dough that rises, comes to life. This dough is not a dead, lifeless lump. Instead, it’s a sphere that pictures spiritual possibilities becoming real. It is a picture of how the Holy Spirit works in our lives even when we least expect it until the

² Romans 8:28

³ Genesis 50:20

⁴ See Romans 8:22-23

whole is affected. Through the changes and chances of this mortal life, the processes of pounding, stretching, and even throwing the dough into the air, where things feel totally out of control, have many parallels to how life in the Spirit works. And after we come through it, we can look back and see how God worked everything together for our good.

Consequently, this parable describes life at the deep end of the theological pool and spawns many questions. But before we get too far in over our heads, the vital thing for us to take hold of is the fact that the lump of dough God is working with is being enlarged and prepared for a greater purpose.

This is a place of mystery. We long all long for comfort and strength amid the painful realities of life that we cannot explain. But Paul tells us “*not to lose heart, for “our light and momentary afflictions are producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.”*”⁵ And as the pounding of the dough takes place, it may produce “*sighs too deep for words within us*”⁶ as the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with “*inexpressible longings.*”⁷

One of our hymns entitled, “How firm a foundation” poetically expresses this principle with the words,

*When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee, I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.
...For I will be with thee thy troubles to bless
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*⁸

⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:16-17

⁶ Romans 8:26b

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ How firm a foundation, Hymn # 636, 637, verse 4, The Hymnal, 1982

The faith that we profess has many challenges and obstacles. Even Paul admits that at times it appears that ***“we face death all day long: we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”***⁹ Yet, he refuses to give in to despair. He insists that ***“...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”***¹⁰ We are called to live boldly, for ***“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things?”***¹¹

The “all things” that Paul refers to include the unsearchable riches of Christ that Jesus alludes to in parables about “The Hidden Treasure” and “The Pearl of Great Price.” Both end with precisely the same action described with slightly different words. In the first parable, the man goes and sells all he has and buys the field; in the second, the merchant goes and sells all he has and buys the pearl that was found. The kingdom of heaven is worth infinitely more than any sacrifice, trial, or trouble we may have to endure to gain it.

Kingdom treasure is like that. It may be in our midst, but we can miss its actual value if we are not careful. The kingdom of God is at hand; it is within your grasp and will bring eternal blessedness to those who take hold of it. And those who discover its real worth will ***“shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He that has ears let them hear.”***¹²

⁹ Romans 8:36 – A verse that Paul takes from Psalm 44:22

¹⁰ Romans 8:37

¹¹ Romans. 8:31-32

¹² Matthew 13:43