

Pentecost 8 Year A

Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

Jesus put before the crowds another 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."

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we know that

Prayer + Faith + Action = Real World Results.

Faith without Action is dead.

Help us Pray while we work, Lord, here at St. Chris's.

-AMEN

Homily:

Just about everybody has heard the Parable of the Mustard Seed.

It was well known in Jesus' day, too.

Matthew, Mark's and Luke all mentioned it! ⁱ

Although each of those three Gospels tell pretty much

the same Parable of the Mustard Seed,

some scholars suggest that Mark's Gospel came first,

and that Matthew and Luke borrowed from it.

Maybe so.

But however, it worked out, 21 centuries ago,

each of those Gospels had its own unique audience,

and each Gospel writer presented the Good News,

in a slightly different way.

Different strokes, for different folks!

They apostles were trying to share Jesus' story
with everyone they could. That was God's plan.

The Gospel's were written 60-70 years after Christ's ascension,
In Koine Greek because that was the everyday business
language of the Eastern Roman Empire. ⁱⁱ

Koine Greek was the world's common everyday language.

Matthew and Luke were better at Greek than Mark.

They were a lot smoother. ⁱⁱⁱ

They used the Greek equivalent of the *English* English,

Which our beloved friend Vera learned,

growing up in London.

Mark's Greek is sort of rough. Like American English.

Blunt and to the point.

Mark wrote in a hurry. Kind of impatient.

Matthew and Luke didn't write like that.

they were probably more patient.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke told many of the same stories,

Even though they spun things a bit

for their intended audiences,

The Gospels are like Newspapers:

The Killeen Daily Herald, The Austin Statesman, and
The New York Times.

They cover many of the same stories,
But with different spins, for different audiences. ^{iv}

Matthew wrote today's Gospel.

He saw Jesus as The Messiah: God's anointed person!
The one guy who could guide the Jewish people forward.

Matthew saw that the Pharisees were opposed to Jesus.

He called them "hypocrites",
and worried that they wouldn't get to be with Jesus
in the Kingdom of God. ^v

People still worry about that today.

Have you ever been asked, "Are you 'saved' "? ^{vi}

Matthew had it right though,

Jesus told the Mustard Seed parable
To show us The Kingdom of God. ^{vii}

The birds of the air, Jesus said,

can rest safely, in the branches of the tree,
that grows from the little mustard seed of faith.

The birds like us, live subject to life's every breeze and chill.

To need to get out of the hot sun just like we do.

No matter how hard we try to be safe and secure,

Our lives are as delicate and contingent,

As are the little sparrows.

She seeks shelter, and so do we.

Our Faith is the mustard seed, and

The Father is the tree.

Jesus is the branch.

Jesus gives us a safe place where we are shielded

from life's changes and uncertainties...

Where it is always green and cool,

And the neither the sun nor the heat,

Nor the cold nor the wind, can find us. ^{viii}

Matthew assures us, that Jesus Lives

and that we can rest easy with him.

Matthew assures us that however much faith we have,

That faith will, like a mustard seed, grow and grow and grow.

We can rest easy, Mathew says, because our faith has saved us.

But Matthew's Gospel really isn't about Rest.

Mathew wrote an action filled Gospel

and Matthew was an action guy.

Mathew believed -- and I know he was right --

That Jesus calls us to action.

2000 years ago, and still today,

The time to act is *now*.

The work we do today,

Is rooted in the work done by Christ, and

It is rooted in the labors of this parish's

founding Mothers and Fathers.

Now is the time to act is *now*!

Here, at St. Christopher's, we have our safe place.

Here, we can act for the Kingdom, assured that we are safe.

Here, we can act with confidence, guided by God's love.

The winds of culture will blow and

the landscape of our daily lives will change.

Whoever we are. Whatever we have. Wherever we are.

We are safe in the branches of God's tree,

Grown from the seed of our faith.

The gates of hell cannot prevail against the peace
which passes all understanding. ^{ix}

God has called each of us to work,
And our Kingdom work must continue,
whoever we are, and wherever we are,
on our life's journey.

God calls us to action, right here, in Killeen. Right now, in Texas.

Let's go!

AMEN

ⁱ Mark 4:30–32 and Luke 13:18-19.

ⁱⁱ “Koine” Greek was the common tongue for many people in the Eastern empire; in fact, the word “koinonia”, which means “fellowship” -- derived from the word “koine” -- mean to have something in common. koine Greek was much like English is today, the language of business and the common tongue of many far-flung people. Koine was the Greek of the social elites; it was the tongue of the people, of “Joe and Jane Blow”. The Gospel was written

for the people, by the people. In fact, the Gospels were written in what they called “codex” form, something like a modern book, rather than the scrolls, used for academic and official writings.

ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, Luke wrote that he wanted to correct mistakes, in earlier accounts. See *Introduction to the Gospels*, NRSV (Oxford University Press), and Luke 1:1-4.

^{iv} Even though each of those Gospel writers had his own agenda, Scholars like to say that they viewed Jesus through the same lens. That is why they are called “synoptic”, i.e., one lens or one eye.

^v The Pharisees were members of an elite social movement, which arose after the completion of the 2nd Temple. When that Temple was destroyed by the Romans, in the mid 70’s AD, their system became the basis of Rabbinic Judaism, which focused on study of the Hebrew Bible and observance of God’s commands, rather than the formal worship and sacrifice, which could no longer be done since there was no Temple. Thus, modern Jews necessarily attend synagogue (after a Greek term which refers to a place of learning), rather than “Temple”.

In Jesus time there were many conflicts amongst the Jews, including conflict between the Pharisees (who emphasized the Torah, its interpretations, and Temple rites), and the Sadducees(who favored those less and Hellenization more, and who rejected the resurrection of the dead).

But important ancient writers, such as Josephus, tried to show that “common people” “just” regular folks, detached in practice from the machinations of the main groups.

^{vi} Or are you “damned”?

^{vii} Matthew thought that Jesus was trying to reveal the Kingdom, to a people who were about to lose it.

^{viii} The mustard seed is about God’s rule over His Kingdom: Both the beautiful but mortal creation in which we live now, and the Kingdom of Heaven, which will welcome each of us, in God’s time. See, Ezek. 17:23-24.

^{ix} The siren song of our culture sells happiness by the dollar and the ounce and the pound, but happiness cannot be found.