

The kingdom of heaven is like.... What is the Kingdom of heaven like?

I think Jesus is inviting us to hear these parables today and wonder what the Kingdom of Heaven means to us. Which parable might we identify with? If you are a merchant, or a baker, or a farmer, or a fisherman, one of these might make more sense to you than the others. Those of us who are not in any one of these professions might still also be able to connect with one of them to get at what Jesus is trying to teach us about the Kingdom of Heaven.

Understanding. That's what Jesus is after. Jesus doesn't ask people to repeat after him. He doesn't want us to memorize his sermon when he has told us that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. There's nothing wrong with memorizing a Bible verse, but what Jesus is more interested in doing is to reach us here (heart), not so much here (head.)

We all know what it feels like to want something very much; to a teenager it might be the latest jeans or shoes. To a bride it might be the prettiest diamond. For the rest of us it might be a better car, a comfortable place to live, a new sofa, a dreamed for vacation. We have physical concrete desires as humans. And we know what joy we feel if we are finally able to achieve the goal of obtaining our desired object..

What does that feel like? A sense of accomplishment, peace of mind, and some serenity of spirit. That's what Jesus is getting at. Of course, with human desires sometimes that goal is fleeting, because.... it's stuff. It can give much joy, but the joy often fades when we start to set our eyes on the next thing we want. The Kingdom of Heaven is peace and joy on a deep, lasting spiritual level.

The other aspect of these parables is how one tiny, inconsequential thing, a mustard seed or a bit of yeast, can grow and grow and become what holds up the bread, or makes a large bush to be a home for creatures who rest in its shade.

One idea, one person can make a difference no matter how small that difference seems. One man died this last week who is like that mustard seed or a bit of yeast that leavens the whole batch. That man is John Lewis. He, along with many others, was just one of the people who walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Bloody Sunday, one of the marches from Selma to Montgomery Alabama in 1965 to protest against segregation, and for the equal right to vote. John was just one person who was at the March on Washington. He was just one of the Freedom Riders seeking to desegregate the interstate buses of the South. He was just one of thousands who protested during the 1960s and it made a difference.

Mr. Lewis's work didn't stop there. He made a difference in Congress for 17 terms and finally this year, after the terrible deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others, he was just one of the people who marched in Washington in the Black Lives Matter protests. The small amount of yeast grows over time. So from the first struggles for equality for all people following the Civil War to now, it has taken a long time to make this mustard seed grow into a mighty bush where birds can make nests and find shelter.

Many of us have finally understood that changes need to be made; in some places changes to laws, but certainly in all places, changes in our hearts to have us become anti-racists. This is also what the Kingdom of Heaven looks like.

It is a place where everyone is seen and respected for who they are. Skin color, language differences and ethnicities are acknowledged but not dismissed. John Lewis, together with Martin Luther King, Jr. strove to teach the rest of us many things. One of them is about love. Mr. Lewis has said, echoing MLK, "Hate is too heavy a burden to bear. The way of love is a much better way."

Gee, I think Jesus has said something like that too, and so has our presiding bishop, Michael Curry. Bit by bit the mustard seed of the Kingdom of Heaven is growing into a large bush.

When white folks like me seek better understanding of what our brothers and sisters of color are really going through, then we show that we are seeking the way of love, of patience, of respect and empathy. When we start reading more, watching films and discussing them, and having conversations in our neighborhoods, we too are seeking to become Kingdom people. And we can do more than that. Our Connecticut State Legislature is now debating a bill, "The police accountability bill" which is one way for us to have a role in making sure that every person is treated with equality and respect; both those in uniforms who are charged with protecting us, and all citizens of every creed and culture and ethnicity.

As of Friday at 10:30 AM the Police Accountability Bill passed in our State Legislature!

In the parables we heard today, the lesson is that the Kingdom of Heaven will grow within us if we just take the first step of faith and willingness to learn. It will grow almost exponentially just as leaven grows within the dough.

Thank you to all of you who did your homework assignment from last Sunday. You'll see a collection of photos taken by parishioners following this sermon. These are places of peace and inspiration. They are pictures of hope and serenity. These might be places where you have found the Kingdom of Heaven outside of the church's four walls. Even if

you weren't able to send me a picture this week I hope that this little exercise has helped you to find God's loving presence in our world today, despite all the difficulties we face.

One man who came from God, and even though he was one man our Christian faith has grown like a mustard seed grows into a huge plant. That one man is Jesus Christ our Lord.

The kingdom of heaven is like....I'll let you finish that sentence with your own.