

Matthew 13.31-33,44-52 – Seventh Sunday after Trinity – 26 July 2020

In our reading we hear six parables about the kingdom of heaven –

The mustard seed – how a small mustard seed grows into a bush large enough for the birds to nest in. Biblically, trees represent kings and their kingdoms – see Ezekiel 31 and Daniel 4 – and birds are non-Jewish people, so the imagery of the mustard seed is of the Kingdom of God – a humble mustard seed signifying the humble beginnings of what turns out to be the majestic ministry of Jesus in bringing the glorious kingdom of God to bear on earth...

Yeast needed to be removed from Jewish households during Passover – sometimes signifying the widespread negativity that arises from small beginnings – in Paul's letter to the Corinthians he speaks about how pride can be seen as yeast infecting the dough and urges them to make a new batch of bread 'unleavened as you are meant to be...getting rid of the yeast of evil for unleavened bread of sincerity and truth....

Treasure and pearls – conveying how priceless the Kingdom is compared to anything else – not always noticeable at first – but nevertheless waiting to be revealed...

The dragnet thrown into the sea – the net could be the world and the fish of every kind – like the wheat and the tare in the earlier parable – can signify those who seek and turn themselves over to the kingdom and kingdom values of love and justice and peace or those who seek to remain in the world honouring the worldly clamour of power and prestige and greed and the suchlike.

And Jesus finally explains to the disciples that while they are being trained for the new kingdom way – their old training in Scripture and Jewish heritage will blend and mingle with the new training and teaching of Jesus.

And it's that training and teaching of Jesus that is so compelling and accessible to those with ears to hear and eyes to see, isn't it?

In between these parable verses, Matthew makes the point – 'All this Jesus said to the crowd in parables; indeed he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet: 'I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.' (verse 34).

This is what Jesus does – he utters what has been hidden. And what is it that is hidden – in the scripture and the stories and in the silence – it is the truth. Not just the truth according to some preacher or doctrine or theological concept or church tradition – but THE TRUTH. This is what Pastor, theologian and writer Frederick Buechner says about this;

“I” [Jesus] said “I am the truth” (Jn 14:6)Jesus did not say that religion was the truth, or that his own teachings were the truth, or that what people taught about him was the truth, or that the Bible was the truth, or the church, or any system of ethics or theological doctrine. There are individual truths in all of them, we hope and believe... the truth about who we are and who God is if there is a God, the truth about life, the truth about death, the truth about truth itself. That is the truth we are all of us after..... a truth that can never be put into words because no words can contain it a truth that can never be caught in any doctrine because it will never stay still long enough but is always moving and shifting like air.... A truth beckoning us in different ways and coming at us from different directions. And I think' – he continues – that is precisely why whenever Jesus tries to put that ultimate and inexpressible truth into words... the form of words he uses is a form that itself moves and shifts and beckons us in different ways and comes at us from different directions. That is to say he tells stories. Jesus does not sound like Saint Paul or Thomas Aquinas or John Calvin when we hear him teaching the Gospels. “Once upon a time” is what he says. Once upon a time somebody went out to plant some seeds. Once upon a time somebody stubbed a toe on a great treasure.... The Gospels are full of the stories Jesus tells, stories that are alive in somewhat the way the truth is alive, the way he himself is alive

There is a time when Pilate asks Jesus directly what the truth is – and Jesus is silent. Jesus was the truth and Pilate couldn't see it – what could Jesus say? But Buechner goes on to reflect that what Jesus says is just that – silence – and the silence is a way of saying “Look at my aliveness if you want to know [the truth]! Listen to my life!

'He said nothing to them without a parable' Jesus said himself 'I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.'

And it is true what Buechner says – we hear the stories over and over again and explain them to the core – 'like photographs that have been exposed to the light for so long they have faded almost beyond recognition...'

But in the stories Jesus tells – perhaps it is our own stories we are supposed to be seeing in them. Is it our own truth we are supposed to be revealing – truth about ourselves *right now* – because that is the only truth we have right now - the way it is right now. And that is the only God we have right now – the God who is living now – not in the past – not in the present – but the living God who lives alongside us *now* – and that living God is Jesus – the living God, the living Word – the word made flesh.

Jesus shines the light on our lives – on our stories – by the stories he tells about us – about what it means to be human and live through the human experience this side of heaven's gate.

Jesus himself IS the story. Jesus is the one who calms the storm – chases the money changers from the temple – tells us that we have to be like little children coming to the Kingdom – like he is a child before is Father and our Father – he tells us how we have to trust what we can't see – to love our enemies when they're hurting us – to tell the truth at the expense of being liked – to love the unloveliness of the world so that it might in the end turn into that love in itself....

Jesus is the truth – the way – and the life – the whole story of Jesus is the whole story of our own life – our life before us and ahead of us. He is showing us through his stories – and by being the story – how to do the story of life – hour by hour – day by day – step by step....

Jesus wants us to be nothing other than his – to follow nobody but him – to give him everything so we can receive the same from him – that is the story..... and I quote again from Buechner 'And only then the miracle that not even all our tragic and befuddled history has ever quite managed to destroy. Only then the miracle of you and me not just talking about him two thousand years later but holding on to him for dear life – believing from time to time that he is indeed the one we draw dear life from, dearest life.....'

We have a choice – to choose that our story and truth is contained in Jesus' story – a love story indeed – and a story that tells of God's love for us and the journey towards receiving the light and peace of that love – a story that cannot be explained but one of mystery – a story to be lived and not theorised. A love story to be experienced – or, of course, we can choose not to....

'I will open my mouth in parables. I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world...Let those with ears, hear...' Amen

Rev Jacqueline Drake-Smith