

## Sermon

### Matthew 13:44-58

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Well how has your week been? Did you find any opportunities for prayer? Have you been thinking about casting out the seed of the Word like the Sower in last week's parable? Indiscriminately, generously, perhaps even recklessly?! This week's parables continue the farming flavour, and I think contain just as thought provoking messages for today's world. And the two later parables of the yeast and the mustard seed are particularly encouraging. They seem to imply that from little things, big things grow. Isn't that a wonderful Paul Kelly song, for those of you about my age?! And I am hoping and praying that these parables are also metaphors for our journey, that from our small congregation, we too can grow, perhaps surprisingly, into a church with multiple generations, people with young children, as well as people who don't have children in the home, and of course people who are grandparents, or even great grandparents. These parables talk about the presence of the kingdom of heaven in our lives and presence is an essential part of growing the kingdom. Let's have a look at the parables of the Weeds, of the Mustard Seed and of the Yeast.

So after telling the crowds the parable of the Sower, which we explored last week and which I've published on the Sermons page of our website in case you missed it, and then explaining it to his disciples, Jesus put before them another parable, and we hear about the "kingdom of heaven". What is this kingdom of heaven? It's a term unique to Matthew's gospel, but not unique in meaning. The other Gospels use the term "kingdom of God" or perhaps more accurately "Rule of God".

You see, as Jesus describes in the parables for the rest of this chapter, the kingdom of heaven is not some institution or a far off place in the skies. The kingdom of heaven is a state of being, in the present, in the here and now. Let's listen!

'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away.

So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?" He answered, "An enemy has done this." The slaves said to him, "Then do you want us to go and gather them?" But he replied, "No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

I love this parable! In one graphic description, Jesus tells us both the reality of our lives and the grace of God. In the parable of the Sower last week, we heard about God's generosity, sowing the Word everywhere, giving everyone the option of the Good News, even though there are varying responses and enthusiasms for the Word. This week, we dive deeper into the weeds growing up with the wheat. Our lives will indeed include weeds and wheat. The good and the bad will coexist and if we are entirely honest with ourselves, we will probably acknowledge that both the good and the bad live within our very being. And isn't it just as well that God doesn't, as his slave suggests, go through the fields ripping up the weeds straight away and potentially

damaging the wheat along the way?! God will deal with the weeds when the harvest comes in and in the meantime, we have this period of grace. God is patient with us, prepared to tolerate the evil with the good until the harvest. And that time will come, for in the kingdom, the good, will prevail. In the meantime, isn't it such a blessing that what has been wounded or hindered by evil, will not be crushed, but rescued and transformed for life. We must all strive to be wheat and not weeds.

The kingdom of heaven includes a God of grace. And then Jesus puts before them 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.'

Well what do you notice about this parable? What is its central motif? Do you get a sense of growth, of movement? Of something miraculous happening? There is the contrast between the tiny seed growing into something big enough to be the home of many. There is the contrast between the now of the tiny seed and the future of the big beautiful bush, inviting birds to make their home there.

Is this what Jesus is saying about the kingdom? We might be small now but the possibilities are there! We do have presence. We have our Op shop, a beautiful place to come and browse among the clothes, the books, the knick knacks. There's something for everyone in the Op shop and all at a price that is affordable in these times where money is tight. And our foot traffic through the Op shop would be over a hundred people week in week out. God blesses us with a community who gives and who shops. People of all ages and stages, who come into our place,

people with needs. Let's reach out to them and invite them to a Games night, to Alpha, to the craft group. Let's build our connections with our community, or even just a cuppa, if we sense that that's the need.

And Jesus continues with another parable of growth and transformation with the parable of the Yeast. All of us who have baked will know that this is such a miracle. I love the smell of the dough after it has stood in the quiet warmth of the kitchen and grown exponentially! And out of yeast and flour, comes bread!

'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.'

Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing. This was to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet:

'I will open my mouth to speak in parables;  
I will proclaim what has been hidden from  
the foundation of the world.'

The Gospel writer ends with a quote from Psalm 78. For Matthew it was so important to anchor the story of Jesus in scripture, that all the elements of the Jesus story were foreseen and part of God's plan. And I think God's plan is to allow and encourage us to grow and transform, not just in numbers of people worshipping, but in our own faith. For the kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field. And even though the weeds might grow up around us or in us, God is always a God of grace and will be there waiting for us on the day of harvest.

So how will you respond to these parables? How will you encourage others to come to know the God of grace, the God of growth and healing, the God who loves us beyond measure?

Well perhaps it's time to start praying about our Alpha program that starts at the end of next month. Who will you invite? Today you have all received a card with this question and on the back of the card are three lines for three names of people to invite. Let's look at the Alpha invitation video now.

Let us pray.

God of Mission,  
Who alone brings growth to your Church,  
Send your Holy Spirit to give,  
Vision to our planning,  
Wisdom to our actions,  
Joy to our worship,  
And power to our witness.  
Help our church to grow in numbers,  
In spiritual commitment to you,  
And in service to our local community,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.