

Sunday 30th July 2017 The Kingdom of Heaven is **like...**
Romans 8:26-39 Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Intro: Snapshots

If you happen to be on Facebook and 'friends' with Angie you will have seen over the last week snapshots of her holiday. Each picture shows something beautiful or interesting or both! but each is just a clip, a snapshot of what has been happening. We see just a part of the whole.

In my lounge is a book with photos from my holiday last October. Each picture shows just a small snapshot of what I actually saw, just a small part of the whole experience.

And different shots give different perspectives

Over the last few weeks our gospel readings have given us some snapshots of the Kingdom of Heaven...not the whole picture. Not a 360' cinematic experience. Just some glimpses

2 weeks ago Pat was sharing thoughts based on the well knowns parable of the seed falling on different types of soil.

Last week the gospel was the parable of the farmer sowing seed and then an enemy coming and sowing weeds amongst the good crop

We were thinking about the reading from Romans and being adopted children of God and so heirs of His so as such we should be interested in these snapshots that help us understand more of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like, what they can teach us about our Father God's Kingdom

Each parable is another glimpse that can add to our understanding, another snapshot that helps us develop a clearer picture

So here goes - what does today's reading teach us? what snapshots do we get that can add to our album entitled "The Kingdom of Heaven" ?

Mustard seed & Yeast:

First - a little explanation

Mustard seed produced a weed. No-one would have planted it with the intention of harvesting it. Usually it would have been weeded out but if left to grow it would reach about 3m in height

The seed is TINY and so could get mixed up with the other seed and not be noticed

The mustard seed, so tiny, unappreciated and unwelcome, grew into a plant that could provide shelter for the birds of the air

Yeast ... today it is clean and refined and bought in clean pots. But 2000 years ago it was different. People used 'leaven' to make bread. They kept some leaven aside after each time they made bread to let it 'go off' and be used in the next days bread making. If it didn't 'go off' enough then it was useless and the bread did not rise. If it 'went off' too much it would poison the bread... and those who ate it !!

Remember 'friendship cakes' back in the 80's / 90's ? (Not because they killed people of! -))
Divide it into 3. Make 1/3 into a cake, pass 1/3 onto a friend and keep 1/3 to fester a bit ready to make the next cake

For Jesus' listeners, Leaven was actually a symbol of corruption and impurity.

The tiny seed that was impossible to detect amongst the other seed, the small amount of Leaven mixed in with the dough Both were small and insignificant but from these tiny things came great change, they had great effect and brought about great transformation.

These 2 familiar but less than positive items - an invasive weed and a potentially poisonous yeast - were used by Jesus to give us a snapshot of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like

The potential of this tiny seed and mucky Leaven was incredible. The seed could grow into a bush big enough to provide shelter for the birds, the small amount of Leaven was enough to mix with the dough and feed 100/150 people

Miraculous transformation comes about from these humble, small, troublesome, starting points

What glimpse of the Kingdom do these give us?

Be ready for the Kingdom of heaven to break through in unexpected places, for it to invade our expectations because the Kingdom of Heaven is like the mustard seed, it invades the cultivated soil of our certainties and our boundaries and our ways and creates out of it all something new and unexpected.

Sometimes we try to plan and calculate and prepare and organise everything

BUT the Kingdom of Heaven is likely to break through in the ordinary and unexpected

Hidden Treasure & a merchant looking for pearls

Next Jesus used the snapshots of the hidden treasure and the merchant searching for a pearl of great worth

Rabbinic law said that basically it was OK, it was law, for Finders Keepers... if you found something... then you could keep it.

So let's not get too distracted about the morals of whether it was right or wrong to not disclose the treasure buried in the field. According to the law at the time this was an OK thing to do.

Let us instead look at the emotion of the man who buys the field... Jesus says 'in his JOY' he goes and sells everything. Why? Because the treasure he has found is worth selling EVERYTHING for and he is filled with JOY

The merchant is similar. He was in search of fine pearls and when he found one of great value he then sold everything to obtain it.

In both these stories the men found something that they recognised to be of great worth and willingly & joyfully sold everything they had in order to possess it

What snapshot of the Kingdom do these give us?

Well - the Kingdom of Heaven is precious and valuable and it is there for the taking when we give up everything for it. It is precious but necessitates a demanding decision.

It was costly for these 2 men to acquire their treasure but because they recognised the incredible worth they joyfully sold everything they had to get it

Are we willing to do that? Do we see the incredible worth of the Kingdom of Heaven and with joy in our hearts give up everything we have, surrender everything, in order to be a part of it?

Net for fishing:

Next is the picture of the fishing net

Jesus says the Kingdom of Heaven is like a net thrown into the sea that catches fish of every kind, fish of EVERY kind

The net catches everything, fish of all kinds good and bad, big and small, tasty and not
Every kind of fish is caught

It is not the net that separates, that is left to others to sort the good and the bad

Jesus says that at the end of the age the ANGELS will sort and separate the evil from the righteous

It is not our job to be gatekeepers of the net and to judge the good and the bad, to keep out those we think are evil or bad and let in those we think good or righteous. That is not our job.

Think of the huge dragnets that get reeled out behind modern day fishing trawlers. They catch all sorts of things... different types of fish but also bits of rubbish, sea weed etc

It all needs sorting but the purpose of the net is to catch all the fish

There is an eschatological perspective to this snapshot of the Kingdom. Jesus says 'at the end of the age' At the end of the age there will be some sorting out.

For now the net catches all sorts of fish We are in the net! Along with all sorts of other 'fish' Some that we maybe think are not good enough or unclean or not the same as us or we don't like But it is not for us to sort.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net that is cast into the sea... it embraces all sorts of fish and at the end of the age the sorting will take place between evil and the righteous... we will be included in that sorting

'Have you understood all this?'

Jesus asks the crowd he is talking to have you understood?

Last week in the reading Jesus said 'let those who have ears listen'

This week He asks 'Have you understood all this?'

There is much to be learned about the Kingdom of heaven.

Today these parables have given us some more snapshots of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed and yeast - it will grow from unexpected places, challenging our certainties and planning..... are we looking and ready for that?

It is like treasure hidden in a field and like a merchant who finds something of great value - it is precious and worth us giving up everything we have in order to be a part of it

The kingdom of Heaven is like a huge fishing net that catches all sorts of fish, which for the mean time will live alongside one another until such time as God instructs his angels to sort out the righteous from the evil.

We pray 'Thy Kingdom come...' but sometimes that can feel like an unanswered prayer

Let's start looking for it in different, unexpected places and let us remind ourselves of its great worth and surrender afresh everything we have to be a part of it remembering that it is God's power that makes things possible!