

SERMON  
 First Lutheran Church  
 Aitkin, Minnesota  
 July 27, 2014

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52  
 Romans 8:26-39  
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## CHILDREN'S MESSAGE – “The Runaway Bunny”

### ADULT MESSAGE

“**Today**,” Jesus is talking about **today**, our world, our church, **your life and mine**. Jesus is talking to the folks who are **being bombed** and to the ones who are doing the bombing over in Palestine/Israel. Jesus is talking to the folks who are **struggling with family problems**. He is talking to the **teens** who are trying to figure out **which end is up**. He is talking to **you**. Jesus tells parables. Jesus tells stories which are meant to catch our attention. Once they have our attention, the **Holy Spirit plants God's Living Word** of promise, hope and deliverance deeply into our hearts and minds.

In the short little snippets from the **Gospel of Matthew** that we hear today, Jesus tells five parables which begin, “**The kingdom of heaven is like...**”

**Today**, Jesus is talking about **today, your life and mine**. Jesus brought and planted the seeds of the kingdom of heaven here amongst us when he came in the flesh two thousand years ago. Today, Jesus keeps on planting among and within us via worship, scripture, prayer and the fellowship of God's people. **You don't have to wait for God's kingdom**. The things that Jesus teaches about God's kingdom are already at work among us – partially, not yet completed, still looking forward to the last day when Jesus will come again. Listen to Jesus' stories and let God embrace and lift you through them...

Jesus' first two parables talk about **mustard seeds and yeast**. In both cases, earthy life and kingdom life, things start small. A **tiny seed**, hidden out of sight, becomes a bush and then a tree. A **small portion of yeast**, mixed in, unseen, leavens the whole batch of dough and bread results. **Both seed and yeast**, when they do what they are meant to do, **become life-giving**. The seed ends up providing **sanctuary for the birds**. The yeast becomes nourishing **bread for the body**. People, God's work in your life and mine starts with a little seed of faith, grows and, if God has

God's way, comes to the place where it **sustains not only us, but moves through us** to love and care for a hurting and needy world.

Today, Jesus brings the kingdom of heaven to us. Our parables continue with Jesus telling about a **hidden treasure**, a **fine pearl** and **fish caught in a net**. These, Jesus says, describe God's kingdom.

He says the kingdom of heaven is like **treasure hidden in a field** and a fellow finds it. How do you find treasure hidden in a field? He must have been working there, not his own land, likely a tenant farmer or even a servant. Likely the owner has long since died. Whoever owns the land is legally entitled to the treasure. This poor man **sells everything he has** to buy the field and own the treasure. It's not "**have to**." It is "**want to**." This is the biggest and best thing that has ever happened to him. **Yahoo!**

Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant who is **searching for fine pearls**. He must be wealthy. Finally he finds one of great value and **sells everything he has** to buy it. Not, "**Do I have to?**" No, it is "**Yahoo, I've finally found everything that I've been searching for and now it is mine!**"

The first man **stumbled upon** his treasure. The second man was **searching diligently** for his treasure. One was **poor**. One was **rich**. **Both gave up everything** they had to possess what they found. One had little and one had lots, yet both were able to joyfully claim what they longed for and needed. Being a part of God's kingdom is for poor people and rich people. **It is worth far more than anybody has**. And it is **free for anyone**.

Then we hear Jesus' last parable. "**The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind...**" Being caught in a net doesn't sound very good. But in the eyes of God's people in Israel, fish in the net was good and life-giving. And this net **catches all the different types of fish**. The first guy **stumbled** into God's kingdom. The second guy was **searching** for it. And the last guy/fish was literally **captured/embraced** by God's kingdom before he even knew what happened. **And once you are a part of God's kingdom, your life changes**.

And the whole series of parables that Jesus tells ends up with, **“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.”** The **“evil”** are the ones who **missed the kingdom** of God, here and forever. The **“righteous”** ones are those who found themselves in a **love/trust relationship** with the God of all life and creation. It wasn't good people vs. bad people. It was people who knew and trusted God to care for them vs. people who tried to take care of themselves and didn't need God. **We were created to be in a love/trust relationship with God. When we are not there, we are missing the treasure**, the greatest, best and most enduring part of what God intends for all people.

What does the kingdom of heaven have to do with today, with you and me? The Apostle Paul in our text from **Romans 8:26-39** paints a very clear picture for us. **Here's what being a part of God's kingdom means:**

- **“The Spirit helps us in our weakness...”** - We are human - often stubborn, depressed, angry, hurt, overwhelmed, try to take care of ourselves – and **can't go it alone...**
- We don't even know how to pray right sometimes, so the **“Spirit intercedes (for us) with sighs too deep for words.”** (3 times) - The Holy Spirit that you received in baptism joins with Jesus in being our advocates for life, hope and joy amidst all that the world throws at us. **You are not in this alone!**
- **“We know that all things work together for good for those who love God...”** - This, note, doesn't say that God causes everything that happens in our lives. But, it does say that **God will be there to bring about the best good** for us despite the terrible things that threaten to undo us. No matter how hellish your circumstances, victimized or brought it on yourself, **God will help you.**
- God **“foreknew... predestined... called... justified... and glorified”** us, God's people. - Our life and salvation is all God's work on our behalf. You didn't choose God. God chose you. When you decide to go your own way and say, **“To hell with God,”** God doesn't give up on you. God's Holy Spirit will be **faithfully, lovingly in pursuit of you** until the day you die.

- **“If God is for us, who is against us.”** – There is no one more faithful, more powerful, and who loves you more than God does.
- **“Who will separate us from the love of Christ?”** Paul goes through a whole grocery list of the world’s powers and troubles and says **nothing** **“will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** - God loved us enough to suffer a wicked and painful death on the cross for us. There is nothing worse that we can do that will make God stop loving us or give up on us, **nothing!**
  - Broken friendship – God is there for you!
  - Lost your job – God is there for you!
  - Family struggles – God is there for you!
  - Stillborn child – God is there for you!
  - Cancer – God is there for you!
  - Suicide – God is bigger than that too.
  - Drug addiction – God
  - Divorce, Rape, Murder, War – God, God, God, God.
- Paul promises, **“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”** – God’s kingdom isn’t just about **survival**. God means for us to **thrive** in the **peace, security and love** of God’s faithful and eternal embrace.

It was while I was a pastor at Littlefork Lutheran. A forty-something fellow died. His brother was an active member of our church. He invited me to come and meet with their family. Would I do the funeral? They spent the next several minutes telling me that he was a pretty good guy, didn’t swear a lot, not in the bar that much... Often, for people who die and have had nothing to do with God’s people or God’s church, the relatives offer up everything they can think of to show that their **loved one was a good person**. Somehow, without coming right out and asking, they are hoping to hear, **“Yes, John was good enough to be going to heaven.”**

I knew a little bit about John. He had a reputation for carousing, drunkenness, fights, womanizing... **“Well,”** I asked, **“did John ever go to church or Sunday school? Was he confirmed?”** **“No, never. Our parents didn’t raise us in the church.”** **“Do you think maybe he prayed some?”** **“I don’t think so.”** I was looking for some connection that he had had with God. **“Well, he must have been baptized wasn’t he?”** **“No, he never even got baptized.”**

After planning the funeral and finishing the visit, I went back to my office. As I slumped into the chair at my desk, the words literally slipped out of my mouth in a great big sigh, “**I can’t even claim baptism in my funeral sermon... There’s nothing left but the grace of God.**” And then it hit me like a 2x4 alongside the head, “**There is never anything but the grace of God to claim when someone dies.**” If any of us is going to be saved, it is only because of the amazing grace of God who will not stop loving us, who forgives our sins, heals our broken lives and carries us gently into eternity with God. **Did the forty-something guy go to heaven?** Only by the grace of God. **Will I go to heaven?** Only by the grace of God.

God wants each and every one of us. God dies and rises again for us. God forgives us again and again and forever. God chooses us to be children of God. God loves and cares for us all of our days. God promises to bring us home on the last day.

“**Today,**” Jesus is talking about today, about you and me and our world. That’s how God’s kingdom works. God plans for you to be a part of it. Today and forever. **That ought to make a difference in how we live. Thankfully. Confidently. Hopefully. Faithfully. Generously...**

And God is going to hang on to you no matter what. That’s the kingdom you are a part of. **Treasure.** Are you hanging onto God? **Treasure** – worth everything else you have and then far more. **Yours. The kingdom of God.** Thanks be to God. Amen.