

I am sure many of you are familiar with the country music song “Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places.” The lyrics of this song came to mind as I was studying today’s gospel lesson. The words go like this:

I was lookin' for love in all the wrong places  
Lookin' for love in too many faces  
Searchin' their eyes, lookin' for traces  
Of what I'm dreamin' of  
Hopin' to find a friend and a lover  
I'll bless the day I discover,  
Another heart- lookin' for love.

Obviously, this song describes a person’s quest as he or she is looking everywhere, looking in too many faces and all the **wrong places**, trying to find love. He or she is trying to find someone who will fill his or her deepest desire – looking for that one person who will supposedly be the answer to one’s dreams.

This song came to mind because I believe these words can describe something else within each of us, something that is **not** just a quest for a significant other or soul mate. These words can describe the way we who are human are looking for something to fill a longing deep within each one of us, a longing that sends us seeking. These words can, in one way, be descriptive of our quest for God’s presence in life, a presence that can **only** be revealed by a gracious God of love. We long for the dream of God, for

God's kingdom and presence to become realized in this world and in our lives. **But, we tend to look for God in all the wrong places.** We tend to look for God out there someplace, up in the heavens or someplace far away.

Today, Jesus continues to describe the kingdom of heaven, the way we talk about God and the way God is at work in this world. And, his words are rather surprising. He does not describe a kingdom that is far off in the distance, in some exalted place up there or somewhere out there. No, he describes the reign of God by using analogies that are literally **very down to earth** – a mustard seed, some yeast, a thief and a merchant. In his stories, he uses examples of an annoying seed and a corrupt agent. He describes qualities that seem hidden, and he uses some rather corrupt characters in the process.

The parable of the mustard seed is one of the best known of Jesus' stories. Mustard seeds are so small they are almost weightless. They can easily go unnoticed. They can lie hidden and undetected in a large sack of other seeds. I can imagine an unsuspecting farmer unwittingly sowing a mustard seed in his field as he is sowing wheat.

Mustard is actually a **wild** weed. It is something farmers would try to get **out** of the field because, once it is sown, it is hard to get rid of. Jesus

uses the example of a bothersome weed that grows from a small, hidden seed but, when germinated, becomes a huge bush that tends to take over the field. Jesus is describing the way God is at work in this world. And, he compares it to a miniscule, annoying seed that can hardly be seen, but grows and is transformed into a life-giving tree as it becomes a leafy haven where the birds can make their nests. In this little parable, unnoticed beginnings of the work in the kingdom of God are contrasted with great, even surprising results. Have we been looking for God in all the wrong places?

Then, Jesus goes on and uses another example - yeast or leaven. Yeast was an unwanted agent. It is something that bloats and rots corpses. It is also something women would attempt to get rid of when cleaning their homes in preparation for Passover. In Jewish tradition, yeast was a symbol of corruption and impurity. It was considered evil and unclean. However, in Jesus' parable, we find out that **yeast** becomes the agent of miraculous growth of God's kingdom and it permeates **every part** of the dough. Like a woman who spoils the flour with yeast, God is fermenting the kingdom of heaven within the world, within our communities, and within each one of us. That kingdom permeates **all** of creation and it has transforming power in this world. In light of these stories, do we have

eyes to see God's reign hidden in everyday life? Are we able to trust God's transforming presence and love in the midst of everyday life? Or, are we too often looking for God in all the wrong places?

In the next little story, Jesus uses the analogy of a deceitful thief. He tells the story of a man who discovers treasure buried in someone **else's** field. The man then quickly sells all that he has to buy the field from this other guy without telling the owner about the treasure. Actually, I have to wonder what this crooked man was doing digging around in someone else's field in the first place. Yet, in light of Jesus' story, I ask, is God like that thief who gives up **all** he has to buy the **whole** field – the world, the cosmos – simply to possess that treasure and claim it and the entire purchase as God's own? Can we picture a God with so much grace? Have we been looking for God in all the wrong places?

Jesus just continues telling one yarn after another. His next one is about a pearl merchant. Now, merchants were **not** held in highest esteem in ancient culture. In this little story, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a merchant searching for that one pearl of great value. When he **joyfully** finds it, he sells everything he has in order that he may buy that one pearl. In essence, this merchant puts himself out of **business** by radically selling all he has to make the ultimate purchase. In light of this

story, I ask, “What is the most radical act through which we see God’s immeasurable love for this broken world?”

As we move through Jesus’ stories, we come to the Parable of the Dragnet. When the net is cast into the sea it catches all kinds of fish, good and bad. The fishermen indiscriminately pull in all the fish and wait to sort them out later. In our world, the good, the shady and the bad **do** exist together, even within our own selves. And, in our world, we often spend too much time trying to figure out who is in and who is not. I have to say, if those fishermen are willing to pull in all sorts of fish and have them sorted later, I think we can let God take care of the sorting in God’s own good time because God is the one who **loves** us the most.

Jesus uses examples of unscrupulous people and questionable items to describe God at work in this world. Today, Jesus shares some staggeringly good news. The reign of God is **not** far away, but very close at hand. It is present to us, between us as people of God, and even within us. And, in the person of Jesus, we find the **God of creation**, not far off, but incarnate and present to us in human form. **We no longer have to look in all the wrong places to find God**, to find the **author** of love. We no longer have to look in all the wrong places to discover **we** are loved. The truth is, God’s kingdom is closer to us than the air we breathe, and

God is at work in each one of us, even in those parts of ourselves we want to hide. God is even embracing our brokenness and transforming us in the process.

My friends, “The kingdom of God is still under construction and **we** are still under construction. But, that kingdom is growing. The good news is that God so loves the world that God is continually at work in our lives in the world, in order to draw us, in love, closer and closer to God’s self and to each other.” (Frederick Buechner)