

Pentecost 9 A – 07/30/2023

The kingdom of heaven is like.... In Matthew we continue to hear this phrase completed by Jesus in his parables. During this sermon, I would like you to think about how you would complete this phrase.

Jesus goes back and forth between the crowds and his disciples. Usually telling a parable that describes what the kingdom is like and then explaining it to his disciples. How Jesus described the kingdom is not always how the church leaders described it. Jesus of course has expectations, but he was graceful. Often church leaders were only about telling people how they were not keeping the law as they understood it.

I believe the kingdom is about stating the truth, but gracefully. In my work with the developmentally disabled we taught the staff about positive approaches. It was important to look at limitations as well as potential. One received more cooperation when asking as opposed to telling them what to do. Potential and limitations were truth, just as it is with everyone of us.

The kingdom is about realizing who we are as a faith community. This discovering again and again what our strengths and weaknesses are and capitalizing on our strengths or gifts that God has given us. We as Faith Lutheran Church in Okemos cannot meet all of the needs of the community and we are not called to.

Over this next year we will be identifying the gifts that God has given us through individuals and then how we are more capable of doing the ministry that God is calling us to when we put them altogether. When we offer our gifts back to God, God can multiply our ministry far and above what we could imagine.

In our Gospel lesson today, we hear that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that someone planted in a field. A small seed that usually only grew to five or six feet in the Mediterranean, agrarian culture. It would have never been considered a tree. Here Jesus describes it as the greatest of shrubs and that it becomes a tree.

The birds recognize it's worth and come and make nests in its branches. From something small, that may seem insignificant, it grows into something that has significance to those who are able to recognize it. The kingdom began with a small group and has continued to grow and the actual purpose of the kingdom is to grow it.

Then we have a woman and we know women were not on par with men in the culture that Jesus lived and still often today. Since Jesus knew that and he

enjoyed turning things upside down in his parables. The woman seemed to be doing just a daily task of making bread for a family.

Then Jesus has her mixing in three measures of flour. The New International Version highlights this by saying that she used an excessive amount of flour, about sixty pounds. This would create dough for over 100 loaves of bread.

Again, Jesus has taken someone insignificant in the scheme of society and used her to point out that everyone is important in the kingdom. Women can grow the kingdom just as well as anyone else. This is true, but is this all Jesus wants us to see?

I wonder if Jesus is trying to say if you take the gifts that I have given you, singular and plural, and use them to glorify me then the kingdom will grow. Jesus keeps telling us to learn from the past, but to look forward. Stay focused and look for signs of the kingdom in different places. For me it is about seeing potential.

For me the kingdom of heaven is having the ability to see the gifts that we have and believing the potential in them. The gifts that we receive from God are to be shared and not with only the people in this room. Churches who do not share their gifts outside their doors will eventually close.

It boils down to where our focus is or what and where we are seeking the kingdom of God. We have been reminded in our Gospel lesson that all we have to use what gifts we are being given, and the kingdom will grow and flourish. I want to emphasize will grow and keep growing.

I believe that once we see a glimpse of the kingdom here, it also gives us a glimpse of the kingdom yet to come. This is what keeps us seeking more and more sightings of the kingdom. The question becomes what are signs of the kingdom?

When we are looking for the kingdom we are called to be looking outside of these doors. We can see a sign of the kingdom when food is taken out of the 3 food boxes that are stocked by our box brigade.

I believe that we will see a sign of the kingdom at our booth on Meridian Township Pride Day on August 26.

I believe that we will see signs of God's kingdom at VBS this week.

I would ask you to e-mail signs of the kingdom that you see throughout the week.

Notice I say, I believe as that is what Jesus is challenging us to do to believe that we will see signs of the kingdom as we are doing what we are called to do. We will see signs as we utilize and share the gifts that God given us. We are called to share God's love without limitations. This love is lived out as we utilize the gifts that we have been given.

Our Hymn of the Day becomes a reminder to ourselves as well as to each other: Seek first the kingdom of God and live out God's love through the forgiveness, salvation and new life offered to us by Jesus, and all of these things shall be added to us.

Ask and the kingdom will be given to us, seek and we will find; knock and the door will be opened to us.

We do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Our Gospel lesson today reminds us of the potential in living out the kingdom and that everyone has been given gifts to do this individually and as a community of faith. Living out the kingdom like the seed that grew beyond what anyone would have thought. It was planted and taken care of and it became the greatest of all shrubs. Jesus used a woman doing something that seemed common and ordinary in the baking of the bread. She used an excessive amount of flour that could produce many loaves of bread. Each of these parables illustrate the potential in growing the kingdom when we use the gifts that God has given us in God's name.

So if I were to ask you to complete the phrase – the kingdom of heaven is like..... How would you finish it?