

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 Sermon for July 26, 2020 by Pastor Donna Alm

Almighty God, you have set in place an eternal plan for those who trust and believe in your one and only Son, our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, to you be the glory! Teach us we pray to *“be sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”*. Lord in your mercy... hear our prayer. Amen

We hear this morning in our gospel *“The kingdom of heaven is like...”* What are we being told in these parables before us this morning? Why on earth does Jesus speak in parables? Why beat around the bush Lord, just give it to us plain and simple, please! Would not more come to you if yours was a more precise and concise message?

Well at the beginning of this 13th chapter in Matthew we hear Jesus answer that very question, which his disciples came to him and asked *“Why do you speak to the people in parables?”*¹ Matthew 13:10 Even the disciples were confused by these stories that Jesus used in His teachings and often asked for their explanations.

Jesus replies to their question, *“The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: (and then Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah) “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.”* Matthew 13:11-13 You see the calloused hearts of these people have caused a shutting down of their basic senses. And we see that still today don't we?

The parable of the Sower at the beginning of this 13th chapter enlightens us to the fact that though God's word, Jesus Christ, will be scattered abroad; the gospel message sown throughout all the world, only some will receive Him. For that word will fall on hard places (hearts that don't understand) and faith will not take root and the devil will quickly snatch it up. That word will fall on rocky places, hearts that are eager, faith springing up quickly only to last a short time because it has no root and when trouble comes, that faith will fall away. Again that word will be received by some but it will struggle to grow among the thorns or *“worries of this life,”* we hear *“the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.”*

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations in this sermon will be taken from *The New International Version Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008).

Only a quarter of the seed sown is received and understood, for it is sown in good soil and that faith we are told *“produces a crop yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”* Matthew 13:18-23

I want us to look at maybe the least looked at parable, where we hear Jesus declare *“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”* Matthew 13:33

Not many of us bake bread from scratch in this day and age, though I do know some that do. I am not one of them, for it is only on special occasions that I will bake my own bread. We are far removed from the days where every household had leaven bread baking in their ovens!

What does yeast do really? We kinda know don't we, it grows when liquid and a sweetener of some kind, sugar or honey are introduced and it foams and bubbles and brews in the flour mixture until what would have been a hard cake of bread becomes lighter and softer and much more pleasing to the palette.

It doesn't take long for this process to occur! We think we understand the science behind yeast and we do know a lot, Wikipedia states that *“In breadmaking, the yeast initially respire aerobically, producing carbon dioxide and water. When the oxygen is depleted, fermentation begins, producing ethanol as a waste product; however, this evaporates during baking.”*

It goes on to say *“It is not known when yeast was first used to bake bread. The first records that show this use came from Ancient Egypt. Researchers speculate a mixture of flour meal and water was left longer than usual on a warm day and the yeasts that occur in natural contaminants of the flour caused it to ferment before baking.”*²

In this passage of scripture before us this morning, we have the tiny good (those little nuggets of yeast) that grows to new heights, rapidly adding value to an otherwise mundane product. *“The kingdom of heaven is like...”*

We have over the past five and a half months witnessed the tiny bad that has grown to new heights, rapidly spreading and isolating a population of billions upon billions of people. This virus has been attacking otherwise healthy bodies and in those with weak immune systems, debilitating them to the point of death in some.

² Yeast, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yeast>

This tiny bad has far reaching tentacles, sending out tiny shoots of fear and worry that under the right conditions, slathered across the Petri dishes of TV and radio media or coffee shop gossip sessions, can grow feverishly, assaulting even the most rooted Christian mind.

It stills our hope, it kills our present, fixating us on the future, the what if's! But what it really does is it takes our eyes off of the tiny good (the kingdom of heaven that has come) that can and will multiple exponentially within us, over and over and over again, when we sweeten it with love, love for God and love for our neighbor as our self.

C.S. Lewis, a brilliant Christian writer, bordering on scary in his 'Screwtape Letters' where he writes as the evil mentor Screwtape, to his protégé Wormwood, the devil and his minion. In these letters, Screwtape is helping Wormwood bring down the Christian, using his incredible knowledge of fallen humanity.

In his letters when he refers to the Enemy, he is referring to God. In one of his letters he says "To be sure, the Enemy wants men to think of the Future too – just so much as is necessary for now planning the acts of justice or charity which will probably be their duty tomorrow..." He goes on "This is now straw splitting. He (God) does not want men to give the Future their hearts, to place their treasure in it. We do. His (meaning the Enemy or God) ideal is a man, who having worked all day for the good of posterity (future generations) (if that is his vocation), washes his mind of the whole subject, commits the issue to Heaven, and returns at once to the patience or gratitude demanded by the moment that is passing over him. But we want a man hag-ridden by the Future – haunted by visions of an imminent heaven or hell upon earth – ready to break the Enemy's commands in the present if by so doing we make him think he can attain the one or avert the other – dependent for his faith on the success or failure of schemes whose end he will not live to see. We want a whole race perpetually in pursuit of the rainbow's end, never honest, nor kind, nor happy now, but always using as mere fuel wherewith to heap the altar of the future every real gift which is offered them in the Present."

He goes on, "It follows then, in general, and other things being equal, that it is better for your patient (the Christian) to be tilled with anxiety or hope (it doesn't much matter which) about this war, than for him to be living in the present." ³

³ C. S. Lewis, *The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics*, New York, NY, by HarperCollins Publishers, 2002, 228-229)

When we are tempted to focus on the tiny bads thrown at us by the evils of this world, what might happen if... we remind ourselves that evil has been defeated on that cross, it holds no power over the believer. For evil is a toothless lion, roaring around seeking to devour its prey, if we let it. The Christian, by grace through faith in God's one and only Son Jesus Christ, though still subject to the ills of this life, are vaccinated against and immune to, the deadly effects of these tiny bads into eternity as Jesus word declares "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?*" John 11:25-26

When we are tempted to focus on the tiny bads, so worried about all that is too come, our focus solely on the imminent Future; what might happen if... we remember in whom we believe. What might happen if... we remember the past just long enough to then rejoice and live with our great hope intact in the present, focusing on the tiny good that is within us, God's Holy Spirit, His kingdom come, ready to be activated at any moment when love trumps worry, when faith trumps doubt, when hope trumps fear. The kingdom of heaven is not to come; it is here and it is now, active and working all through us, both individually as believers and corporately as the body of Christ, the church, like yeast in a batch of dough until Christ comes again in glory and all for the sake of those yet to receive Him as Saviour and Lord.

Remember C.S. Lewis's words "His (meaning the Enemy or God) ideal is a man, who having worked all day for the good of posterity (if that is his vocation), washes his mind of the whole subject, commits the issue to Heaven, and returns at once to the patience or gratitude demanded by the moment that is passing over him." Might we be that man!

The real enemy is Satan and we must trust the Apostle Peter as he reminds and challenges us to "*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...*" 1 Peter 5:8-9

Please pray with me:

Lord, here we are July 26th, 2020 and though we wait for you to come again in glory, we must celebrate you in the here and now (may the present be our sole focus) we must celebrate you in us, your Spirit that works through us, so that fear has no mastery over us, so that the worries of this life don't choke out the incredible gift of faith given us, so that the deceitfulness of wealth doesn't preclude us from yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown, so that the tiny bads don't shake our focus off of the tiny good you have so graciously given us in Christ Jesus our Lord, a good that rapidly multiples and divides in the presence of love, love for you Lord and love for our neighbor as our self. Help us we pray to resist the devil by standing firm in our faith. Lord in your mercy... hear our prayer.

Prayers:

With the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, let us pray for the church, those in need and all of God's creation.

Almighty God, guide your church to proclaim the coming of your kingdom, to live so rooted in the present that we are not tempted into a state of future worries. May our lights so shine before men that they may see you Father and want you for themselves. Lord in your mercy...

Lord, we pray for all who have experienced severe weather here in Alberta. Our crops are abundant this year Lord, we thank you and we pray your hedge of protection over them that they might come through the harvest and feed the multitudes. Lord in your mercy...

Father, we continue our prayers for the world as coronavirus continues to be present and active. Rather than living with the 'what if's of the future, we pray in the here and now. We pray for our researchers working feverishly to find a vaccine or a cure, open wide their minds. We pray for our front line workers who continue to put themselves at risk for the good of all people, surround them with protection and remind them of our love for them. We pray for our governments who are making tough decisions that you lead and guide them through the unknown. We pray for our children come fall that a plan would come together for their schooling, enabling safety for both them and for their teachers. We pray for businesses struggling to make ends meet, give them hope Father. We pray for all people everywhere that all may come to know you and to set their hearts and minds on the gifts of the present entrusting you with all that is to come. Lord in your mercy...

Compassionate Lord, comfort those struggling with anxiety, grief and sickness especially... that they may sense your healing presence. Lord in your mercy...

Into your hands gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen