The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
July 26, 2026
1 Kings 3:5-12, Psalm 119:129-136,
Romans 8:26-39, Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

# Mysteries of the Kingdom

Good morning! In our Collect for the Day, which "collects" the prayers of our hearts and offers them to God for help, strength, and guidance, we ask God, "to help us pass through things temporal, so that we lose not the things eternal,'' through Jesus Christ our Lord. And things temporal, things passing in this world of time and space, can take up a lot of our energy. There is the state of the world, torn by division and conflict, our beautiful planet suffering from the effects of climate change, global markets in disarray. Closer to home, we are concerned about the kind of world our children and grandchildren will inherit, and some of us work and care for beloved elders at the same time we are caring for children. We may have to deal with health setbacks, sudden job loss, financial worries, the loss of loved ones. Fortunately, we also have the happy milestones, the births, the weddings, graduations, promotions, vacations, and just the blessed ordinariness and goodness of everyday life! How can we live in, and appreciate the good things in

this temporal world, and deal with the inevitable times of pain, and sorrow, and suffering, without losing our rootedness in God? What does our Christian faith have to say about these things? What might our readings for today have to teach us about this?

Today's Gospel is a collection of parables, one following another, all different, yet pointing to the enduring values of the Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of Heaven, as Matthew refers to it. Of all the Gospel accounts, Matthew's is the one that emphasizes the importance of the community's Jewish roots, grounded in the gift of the Law and the Covenant, affirming them as a hallowed way of life, yet open to the fresh gift of the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ that transforms them from mere statue into living law. This Gospel is addressed to a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles who seek to follow Jesus in the context of their rich traditions, as well as participants in the new, wonderful universal thing that God is doing through Jesus. How would this community, under the shadows of persecution and division, grow in faith and strength? These parables give them, and us, some clues as to how we can create a community of the Kingdom of Heaven, a kingdom that

is situated in the temporal, **in chronos** time, but is deeply rooted in **kairos** time, the time of the reign of God.

In the parable of the mustard seed, we find that the smallest, humblest things that seem the least likely to amount to much, are of great importance in the Kingdom of Heaven. Mustard seeds are tiny, seemingly insignificant, yet out of them grow vast, bush-like trees with thick branches that provide a haven of shade in the desert, and resting and nesting places for the birds. We can give thanks that in the midst of life in a culture that places a premium on the big, showy and sparkly, the Way of Jesus teaches us that a small seed, blessed by God can grow into something of lasting beauty that does not fade away.

And the Kingdom of Heaven is something infinitely precious, like a pearl of great value, or hidden treasure in a field that we will give of our riches to have and to hold. As Jesus tells us elsewhere in the Gospel, "where your heart is, there will be your treasure also." Notice the treasure is "hidden" in the field. The true riches, the gifts of the Kingdom of Heaven, of God's grace and love, have a hidden aspect. They are not flashy, or on show, and their glory is revealed when we

approach God with reverence and humility. Scripture tells us that God is not in the earthquake, or the fire but in the "still small voice.". In 2 Corinthians 4:7, we are reminded that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that it is clear that the power belongs to God and does not come from us" In Colossians 3:3 we hear "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." In this temporal life, which passes quickly for us all, we can know, by faith, that what is most precious, most sacred, is kept safe under the shadow of God's wings. We can nurture this hidden life within through our practice of prayer, through fellowship, worship and study with our sisters and brothers in the Body of Christ, and through service to the least of those in our midst.

This world we live in tends to operate on a model of scarcity. The Kingdom of heaven is gloriously free from that. Matthew tells us it is like a net that is flung into the sea. And it didn't just take in an adequate number of fish, but fish of every kind, and you can imagine that it was full to bursting, groaning under the weight of all those gleaming fish! Eternal life begins now, in great abundance, full, running over, with plenty for all!

And the Kingdom of Heaven is a kingdom of surprises. Here we have a woman mixing in a bit of yeast with a whole bunch of flour, and just a little caused the bread to rise! It seems so unlikely! And for Jesus' and Matthew's hearers, leaven had different associations. At the holiest feast, Passover, only unleavened bread was eaten. Also, later on in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus warns the disciples about the "leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees," false teaching that can hurt a community. Yet here, this simile is positive, affirming how just a bit of the Good News of the Gospel, can cause new life to arise!

And this is my favorite. Jesus says, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the Kingdom of Heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." In the living storehouse of our faith, we have ancient wisdom that has sustained and guided us down through the ages. And at the same time, the Holy Spirit is still pouring wine into new wineskins, breaking open the Scripture in fresh new ways, and breathing new life into the Body of Christ! The revelation of God's love continues, not limited by the passing of time.

I think it's important to remember that when we ask for the grace to pass through things temporal and not lose the things eternal, we are not asking God just to let us hang on in this vale of tears until we leave this world to go and "receive our reward." Though in this life we will always see through a glass dimly, and some joys fade with time, Jesus blessed our earthly life in his incarnation, and life here is good, to be embraced and received as gift. Instead, in the midst of our living we are not to lose sight of things eternal and live here on earth from the vision and perspective which comes from the heart of God.

Finally, in our lesson from Paul's letter to the Romans, where we find some of the most well-known and well-loved words in all of Scripture, we learn that any suffering, or pain, or sorrow we experience here in this life well be swallowed up in the victory of the love of Christ and the power of his resurrection. Paul is writing to a church of people he doesn't know but is pouring out his heart to share his conviction of the power of the love of God. By his death, Jesus has destroyed the ultimate power of those things that come between us and God, forever! So, in triumph, Paul asked his ancient hearers, and he asks us today.

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Or fear, or uncertainty, violence, despair, cruelty, or isolation? No, in all these things, ALL these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. There is nothing we can do that will ever remove us from his presence, nothing we can do that will cause him to abandon us, nowhere we can wander where he is not, in love and compassion, searching for us to bring us home. With this God above us, beneath us, beyond us, and yet deep within our hearts, we will know the things eternal, in this mortal life and forever more. Amen.