

July 26, 2020

When I started to think about what I wanted to say today, my mind went in a million directions. Then suddenly it dawned on me, Jesus was sowing seeds with his stories, and trusting the Holy Spirit to work in and through them.

So that's what I'm going to do today, I'll just going to tell some personal stories, and trust the Holy Spirit to work in and through them.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like... The Kingdom of Heaven is like...

Our daughter Johanna attends First Covenant Church near downtown Seattle where Kris' father was the senior pastor, and where we were married 40 years ago. It's kind of Kris' family church...

A number of years ago, now, it happened to be a mission Sunday. And they invited their missionary to come and speak to the congregation.

As Johanna tells the story, the missionary got up and started talking about working as a waitress in an IHOP restaurant by the space needle, many, many years ago. And, there was another waitress that worked there whose name was Kris. And her dad was the pastor of that church...

Kris had invited her to some fellowship activities, which in turn led to attending worship, which then led to joining the church.

And as the story of her life unfolded, eventually she went to seminary and became a missionary. She said that her entire life turned on that simple invitation from a co-worker at IHOP. Johanna was able to connect the dots in her story...

After the service, Jo was excited to tell the missionary that the co-worker was her mom who now lived in Minnesota... Kris barely remembers her, but for the missionary, Kris is remembered as the invitation that changed her life. Seeds, that are sown, it's amazing what the Holy Spirit can do.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like... The Kingdom of Heaven is like...

On our front porch, we have a wonderful view of a large rolling pasture. When we first bought the land twenty plus years ago, we moved the sheep over, built a barn and put in fences... Instead of planting a good pasture mix; I just trusted that eventually the pasture would generate its own mix of grasses and clovers...

The first year was awful, it was full of thistles, fox tail, horse tail, dandelions, quab grass and burdock. Just a pile of weeds!

I don't think the sheep were very impressed! But I persisted, and instead of spraying, plowing and planting, I just practiced some intensive grazing, and trusted that eventually the pasture would change to grasses and clovers...

The next year I still had a lot of weeds. But I could also find a few places where the grasses and clovers, had taken root. There was a little bit of hope! The next year things really started to change for the better. I actually had some large patches of good pasture. But I still had one large spot of thistle. I hate thistles. Every year I would go out and cut em down and burn em. But every year they would seem to come back.

For the last fifteen years or so, I haven't been able to cut the thistles down, I got too busy with church stuff... This year as I sit on the porch and look over the pasture, after many years of just letting the grasses grow, it is a beautiful pasture; clovers, a great mix of cool and warm season grasses. Ohh there's a few weeds here and there, you'll always have weeds. Grasses and clovers are like yeast, given enough time, they kinda take over...

The Kingdom of Heaven is like... The Kingdom of Heaven is like...

People might think that being a shepherd is a quaint thing—but, that's not how I remember it! I started out with five ewes; Molly, Polly, Shelly, Skinny Minnie and Freckles. Over the years my flock grew and expanded.

One of the lessons a shepherd quickly learns is that you have to make difficult decisions about who stays and who goes. Over time, of my five original ewes, only Skinny Minnie remained. She was just a good solid ewe, lots of twins, a great mother; I had kept a lot of her ewe lambs as replacements in the flock.

When she was twelve years old, I found her during lambing time lying uncharacteristically in the barn. I checked her and she had been in labor for a long time, and somehow, I had missed it. I'll spare the details, but I quickly delivered two dead lambs, and they had been dead for quite a long time, they were septic...

I gently put Skinny Minnie in a freshly bedded pen. She couldn't walk. I treated her with antibiotics, made sure she had plenty to eat and drink and I moved her often so she wouldn't get too sore lying in one position.

After a while she stopped eating. I knew she was suffering... I knew I had to put her down. Talk about weeping and gnashing of teeth! I recall asking her to forgive me, I recall saying a prayer to God to forgive me. The kingdom of heaven is real, and so is anguish. Thank God for forgiveness, and thank God for redemption...

The Kingdom of Heaven is like... The Kingdom of Heaven is like...

I remember vividly when Johanna was born. I got to cut the cord, and after a few anxious moments, everything was fine and she was crying and screaming. I remember holding her, and

thinking she was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. I put her in Kris' arms, and we just cried and couldn't believe how perfect she was... Suddenly everything in the world seemed to make sense. Everything was right with the world.

And two years after that we had the same experience all over again when Jon was born. Now, both of our kids are married to wonderful people... Love seems to find ways to grow and expand... Those kids are our great loves, and we would do anything for them... And I trust you know what I'm talking about.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. Our God is a creating God, of infinite patience and love. The Holy Spirit blows where it chooses, and blow it will until all things have been redeemed. Thanks be to God for the judgment to love and forgive, to gather to himself the Saint that is carefully crafted in all of us.

And, so goes the kingdom of heaven...

We all have stories that connect and include, forgive and move our hearts... Now, what are your stories about the kingdom of heaven?

Amen