

Breaking News!

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who teaches us about the Kingdom of Heaven, our Savior and our Lord, Jesus Christ, amen.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like... Jesus teaches us about the Kingdom with stories we call Parables. If you can remember all the way back to your Catechism days you might recall a Parable is an “Earthly Story With A Heavenly Meaning.” In this section of Matthew Jesus actually tells 7 different parables. In story form or Parables, Jesus reveals things hidden from the foundation of the world, but now being made known. This is how I think of Parables...

Every day, somewhere, something happens that warrants an immediate response in the media. Programming stops or a news flash runs across the bottom of our screens informing us of something important. These days they happen so frequently we've almost become numb to the biggest breaking news stories of our time. When some Breaking News does actually break through the noise and other distractions we know these are the truly big news items. I mean, who can forget where you were and what you were doing when the news broke of the 911 terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon? Most of us know exactly where we were and what we were doing... Jesus had world- and kingdom-shattering news to share, too. He began his earthly ministry by declaring the Kingdom of Heaven has come near, so we should repent and return to the Lord our God. That's some

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pretty earth-shattering news! Now, in Parables, Jesus explains what that means for his followers and for those who reject his invitation to follow Him.

“Breaking News” seems to happen several times every day since the introduction of CNN back in June of 1980. The Media networks want to catch our attention. When we see the words, “Breaking News,” we know something BIG has occurred. We also know we’re about to learn more. Perhaps you couldn’t care less, but the way in which the networks present these two words is meant to catch our attention and invite our curiosity. We want to know more... Now, the question looms: Just what is this news that’s breaking?

Think back to the events of the morning of September 11, 2001. Where were you at the time? What were you doing when the news broke about the airplanes that flew into the Twin Towers in lower Manhattan and the one that crashed into the Pentagon? This news, like all “breaking news,” broke into our consciousness. It broke into history. It ripped through our communities, shredding conventional ideas, traditional assumptions and long-held beliefs. It was news that altered, modified, shattered and forever changed — us. The John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy assassinations in the 1960s. The moon landing in 1969. Reality, life and human experience would never be the same. These events were indeed “breaking news,” or news that broke in upon our consciousness and awareness.

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This is the meaning conveyed by our gospel reading for today, although certainly not in the negative sense of 9/11. Rather, the news that Jesus breaks is astonishing and incredibly good news. In fact, this is the way the announcement is framed in the gospels. Breaking news: Good news! The kingdom of God is upon us! The kingdom of God is within you! Or, as John the Baptist would thunder, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near”. Jesus himself, after his baptism and temptation in the wilderness, began his ministry by announcing the same exciting, incredible and utterly novel news: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

It’s fair to say that most people — after hearing breaking news — want details. Many have an insatiable thirst for more details, more information, more background or more understanding. If we’re like this, we will stay tuned to our TV, or consult online news sites regularly. We want to know more. As I write this sermon, breaking news is being broadcast about a variety of issues:

- The Navy has located the payload of the Chinese Spy Balloon...
- The IRS is going after waiters and waitresses for tips..
- More than 15,000 dead in Earthquake that rocked Turkey and Syria...
- FBI conducting search of former Vice President Mike Pence’s home...
- The United States has now shot down 3 Objects in our Air Space

The stories that accompany these headlines put the story in context and explain what they mean for our lives. This is what Jesus does in our text. He

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provides context, understanding and insight into his claim that the kingdom of God has broken into history. It shatters everything! What does this incredible, amazing and daring action mean? Jesus explains with parables and metaphors. Okay, he says, the kingdom of God is like:

- A mustard seed.
- Or, try this: It's like yeast.
- Or, here's another way of looking at it: It like treasure in a field.
- It's also like an expensive pearl.

When we look at each of these parables we can draw some conclusions. The mustard seed is so small it's almost invisible. Yet from this tiny seed, a huge shrub develops, large enough for birds such as the little sparrows Jesus spoke of as having much value to our Heavenly Father, to flit about, nest and rest. This is an image of the Kingdom of God whose power is so great no matter how small the work, no matter how small the seed that's sown, it results in something great and amazing. The Kingdom of God is not a thorny shrub where little birds are pierced, uncomfortable, judged and unwelcome. It's such a hospitable place all people, even the meek and hopeless can find shelter and rest. This Parable also reminds us we can't do everything. All we can do is plant seeds. Some "seeds" might be virtually invisible to the eyes of others — insignificant, meaningless, unimportant. We may never even get to see the shrub, but still these tiny seeds grow and develop into a work that's important and meaningful.

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The meaning of the parable of the leaven or yeast is similar to the previous one the Mustard Seed. Something very small, virtually invisible, yields an astounding outcome much larger than itself. In this case, the emphasis is not on external growth, but something that is happening inwardly. The leaven works within the dough. It penetrates, permeates and pervades the neighborhood, the culture, and the world wherever it's introduced. Dough without yeast is heavy, thick, inert, and pretty tasteless. With yeast the dough becomes something completely different. The Kingdom of God is a change agent. It causes expansion, development, and movement. So, what is our image of the Kingdom of God? Are we more like a leavened loaf of bread, or an unleavened piece of flatbread?

The images of both the treasure in a field and an expensive pearl were not uncommon in the first century. Since banks didn't really exist yet, for someone who had something quite valuable, it was common for them to bury the precious item in his backyard or field. Even today some people hide their treasure under their mattresses. Jesus' parable supposes that someone has found a treasure in a field accidentally. What is he going to do? He buys the field so he can legally claim the treasure in the field. The purchase of a priceless pearl is a different matter. The pearl is discovered by someone who is shopping for precious gems, or something similar. Breaking news! The Kingdom of God is more precious than anything in this world. In either case, the wise person gives up everything to

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possess the kingdom! Jesus also seems to imply a sort of “hidden” quality to the Kingdom of God. The treasure is buried; the pearl is isolated inside the shell. Still, some people stumble upon the kingdom of God accidentally while others find it after a long and exhausting search. In any case, once discovered, you divest yourself of anything that would separate you from this great treasure, the Kingdom of Heaven...

This is such good news for people of all times and in all places! The times we live in are dangerous, confusing and can crush our spirits. The Good News of Jesus Christ reminds us God is on our side and we need not give in to our fear. Breaking news! We can leave all our trouble and despair in God’s hands. Breaking news! Jesus says we don’t have to bury our treasure. We do not, and should not, hide our light under a bushel basket. We are agents of the new kingdom! We are heralds and messengers, breaking the best possible news upon a world eager to hear some good news!

May you who have ears hear the voice of our Savior and know the true value of the Kingdom of Heaven that you now possess. May you never bury that treasure in your backyard, but rather share it with everyone who will listen to you. May the yeast of God’s Word fill you with God’s peace and the joy of serving Jesus. Breaking News! God loves you now and forever! Amen!