



# 49A PENTECOST 8A BIBLE STUDY

Secrets of the kingdom

## Abstract

“Therefore, every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

*Matthew 13: 52 (NIV)*

49A Pentecost 8A Bible Study

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### Secrets of the kingdom

Sunday, July 26, 2020 | After Pentecost | Proper 12 | Year A

*Old Testament & Psalm, Option I*

*Old Testament*    Genesis 29:15–28

*Psalm*             Psalm 105:1–11, 45b or Psalm 128

or

*Old Testament & Psalm, Option II*

*Old Testament*    1 Kings 3:5–12

*Psalm*             Psalm 119:129–136

*New Testament*    Romans 8:26–39

*Gospel*             Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

### Matthew 13.31-33,44-52

Jesus tells parables that seek to convey what the kingdom of heaven is ‘like’ or ‘similar to’. Some are about the way it grows and spreads, others stress its value compared to anything else in life.

**This week's resources explore:** ways of understanding the kingdom of heaven.

## Welcome and opening prayer

There is a dual message about the kingdom of heaven. First, it is something that seems very small to begin with but will grow. Like the yeast and the tiny mustard seed, the kingdom of heaven will grow and permeate far and wide. The other images speak to us about the worth or value of the kingdom. For both the treasure in the field and the pearl of great value, someone gives everything to acquire them; the kingdom is worth more than anything else. Which of these images resonates with your understanding of the kingdom of heaven? Which do you find the most challenging?

*Let us Pray*

Lord, mere words cannot convey  
what a privilege it is to be heirs to your kingdom.

As we explore your word today,  
help us to learn about new treasures as well as old.

May we see the amazing things you can do in our lives.

We are part of your kingdom,  
and we come to you in awe and wonder.

Amen.

## The Reading

*Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52 (NIV)*

<sup>31</sup> He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. <sup>32</sup> Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

<sup>33</sup> He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

<sup>44</sup> “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

<sup>45</sup> “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. <sup>46</sup> When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

<sup>47</sup> “Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. <sup>48</sup> When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. <sup>49</sup> This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>51</sup> “Have you understood all these things?” Jesus asked.

“Yes,” they replied.

<sup>52</sup> He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.” <sup>1</sup>

*respond*

For the word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

## Exegesis

*Matthew 13.31-33,44-52*

Here we have six parables concerning the kingdom of heaven. The proverbial smallness of the mustard seed (about 1mm), sometimes contrasted to a sizeable mustard bush (typically 2–3m tall), is referred to in other ancient writings (cf. Matthew 17.20). This comparison stresses that although the kingdom may currently appear insignificantly small, it will grow dramatically. Trees are used as pictures of kings and their kingdoms elsewhere (cf. Ezekiel 31; Daniel 4), and it is thought that birds sometimes signified non-Jews. Jesus’ use of the mustard seed as an image of the kingdom – rather than a more ‘majestic’ species – also draws attention to the unlikely beginnings of the kingdom: in Jesus’ ministry of service rather than the work of a warrior king.

Yeast in dough (leaven) had to be cleaned out of Jewish houses before Passover (Exodus 12). It is sometimes used to picture the spread of negative things from a small start (e.g. 1 Corinthians 5.6-8). However, here it is used to demonstrate again the way the kingdom starts small but has a mighty and wide-ranging effect.

The next two parables (vv.44-46) both convey something of the huge value of the kingdom in comparison with anything else life might offer. They also both echo, from the mustard seed and yeast, the idea of the kingdom not being easily noticed at first glance. Pearls were more valuable than gold at that time.

The parable of the dragnet that indiscriminately catches fish, both good and bad, comes with an explanation. It is similar to the parable of the wheat and weeds (last week: Matthew 13.24-30) in speaking of the separation of good from evil that will happen at the end of the age, and of the persistence of evil agency until then. It is not clear if the net signifies the whole world (in which case the separation is between those who accepted the message of Christ and those who did not), or if it

<sup>1</sup> [Revised Common Lectionary](#). (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

refers to the kingdom (in which case it might suggest a judgement of those who consider themselves members of the kingdom).

Finally, Jesus tells a parable about teachers within the kingdom. Scribes were those who interpreted God's instructions in the Scriptures in order that the people would know how to live God's way. This parable may indicate that, in the kingdom, those who have been trained in kingdom ways (as the disciples have) will draw on their Jewish heritage of knowing God's ways but also on the new things that Jesus is showing them.

## Picture Pointers



- What secrets are within this image?
- What hidden gems do you see in our daily living?
- How might we make the kingdom of heaven more visible?

## Live your faith

Have a go at making some bread this week. As you add the yeast, thank God for his kingdom here on earth. If it turns out well, share your bread with some friends or neighbours.

## Sending out

Lord, it's not up to us to sort the bad from the good,  
the wheat from the weeds.

Rather, send us out to love everyone equally,  
and to do everything we can to promote your kingdom.  
Amen.