

Sermon for Proper 12 Year A – Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

A couple of weeks ago, one of our Sisters at the Convent said “We have a lot of people to pray for. We’ve had a lot of prayer requests lately.” And then another Sister said “And don’t forget we also have to pray for the world. Did you see the news this morning? The world is crazy right now.”

In today’s Gospel from Matthew, Jesus speaks to us about the Kingdom of Heaven. He speaks of it in parables to try to explain it to a people who also lived in a world that was crazy. The world where Jesus lived during his time on earth was a world in which the violent, oppressive regime of the Roman Empire had occupied the Promised Land which had been given to the Israelites by God. The Romans allowed the Jews to practice their own religion, but they also demanded allegiance to their own gods and to their leaders, who claimed to be gods themselves. Jesus spoke to the anxious people of his time in parables about the Kingdom of God to remind them that the Roman Empire was not actually in charge. God, the true king, was in charge of all creation.

In our own time, we can look at our crazy world and think that things seem to be going off the rails. Things seem to be chaotic, unfair, and destined for doom. But

Jesus reminds us in these descriptions of the Kingdom of Heaven that we are not in charge. Our leaders are not in charge. God is in charge, and that is good news.

Humans, in their limited capacity to understand the big picture, believe that we can control certain things about creation. We believe that we can prevent bad things from happening in our lives. We believe that we have control over the future. In some things, we can manage a small measure of control – our own reactions to things, our boundaries, our safety for the most part. Our perceptions of things can be controlled. We can take care of our health to a certain extent, but we cannot ultimately control the outcome.

The kingdom of heaven, says Jesus, is the real system under which we live. Our governments, our businesses, our individual lives, are all just part of a massive, infinite continuum of which we can only see a tiny sliver. Our stories are only a microscopic part of a much, much bigger story. We struggle to comprehend why this good creation, this kingdom governed by a loving God could possibly contain evil, and why it would allow the innocent to suffer. Some theologians say that it's because earth is a classroom, and we are meant to learn through suffering. Some say that it was mankind's own choice to know both good and evil instead of dwelling only in the blissful ignorance of paradise. Others say that we will only

know the reasons for evil and suffering when we finally come face to face with our loving God in eternity. Right now, at this moment, we simply do not know, but we can try and believe that God has a plan.

Jesus describes the Kingdom of Heaven as a humble mustard seed, which contains enormous and unexpected potential. He says it's like yeast, which seems unassuming but gives life to flour and makes it into something nourishing. The Kingdom of Heaven, says Jesus, is a treasure and a pearl that is worth giving up all that we have in order to obtain. It is a net that draws in all of humanity to a system that sorts out evil and ends up only with the good at the end of the age.

God's Kingdom is a reminder to us that our lives, and all the suffering and evil and seeming chaos, actually are part of a story that is heading for a happy ending where there is good at the end of the age. Our earthly kingdoms will rise and fall, and our leaders will come and go, but the King of all creation will endure.

When people ask me why I believe, I tell them of my experiences with the grace and miracles of Jesus Christ in my own life. I then tell them that these experiences have taught me beyond the shadow of a doubt that I am in good hands. No matter

what happens to me, even if I die, God is with me. I am part of God's plan, and everything that happens to me and to the world has meaning.

Dr. Martin Luther King described the progression of God's story perfectly in a sermon at Temple Israel of Hollywood in June 1965 when he said:

“When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.”