

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus paints a series of cameos – a series of pictures which help us to reflect upon the nature of God's Kingdom.

Each image, helps us to discern an important truth about the Kingdom which Jesus invites each of us to be a part of.

The first picture, is of a tiny mustard seed, which when planted grows into one of the tallest of trees – one in which birds can make their nest. It is one of life's miracles, that something so small can grow to such a size.

This picture helps us to understand that God's Kingdom is something which grows, and grows. Although it started small, with Jesus and twelve specially chosen friends – God's kingdom, the fellowship of those seeking to live according to the values that Christ models in his life and ministry, continues to grow to this day, and will do so, until ultimately the kingdom comes to full fruition.

The second cameo, is of a small amount of yeast in the dough. Although starting small, the coming of God's Kingdom is something which will have a profound impact on us individually, and on the life of the world. Just as yeast in the dough, transforms the flour into bread, lives will be literally transformed by the coming of God's kingdom. Living by the values of the kingdom changes us, and changes the world in which we live.

Next, Jesus presents us with two pictures which speak of the value of God's Kingdom. A man is overjoyed to find buried treasure in a field, and the merchant is thrilled to find the perfect pearl; and both sell all that they have to possess the things they have discovered. In exactly the same way, when we discover that we are offered a place in God's Kingdom it is a cause of great joy. It is something beyond price. Something that is worth setting our hearts on and committing ourselves to fully, in order to share in the gift of eternal life that Jesus offers us.

The final cameo Jesus paints is of a fishing net cast into the sea. It is filled with fish of all kind. Some is good to eat, some is not. When the net is eventually pulled to shore, the fish are sorted, and only the good fish are kept. The message Jesus conveys through this picture, is very similar to the parable of the wheat and weeds which we considered last week.

God's kingdom, which exists in the here and now, contains both things that are good, and things that are bad as it grows – but the time will come when that which is bad is cast out, and only the things that reflect the values of God's kingdom will remain.

Having presented each of these pictures to his disciples, Jesus asks them *“Have you understood all of this?”*

That's probably not a bad question to ask ourselves – it is a lot to take on board all in one go, and to really think through the implications.

So, I would like us to spend a few moments now, thinking a little bit more deeply about the pictures Jesus gives us of buried treasure and the merchant discovering the perfect pearl.

These convey a truth that most of us can relate to at some point in our lives. Most of us have experienced that sense of “setting our hearts” on something and then doing everything that we can to possess or achieve whatever it is.

I can still remember as an 11 year old boy, going to a Church Jumble Sale. Back in the early 1970s, Jumble Sales were regular events in the Church fundraising calendar.

On this particular occasion, there was the usual sea of clothes, books, glass, china and various items of bric-a-brac – most of which looked well used and rather uninspiring. However, buried amongst all of this clutter, as something which caught my eye. It was something which I thought would be worth buying, - partly out of genuine interest in the item itself, but also thinking that it was something which might increase in value over time.

I set my heart on buying the item. However, when I asked how much it cost, the figure was more than I had in my pocket. So I asked the person behind the table if it would be possible to put it aside until I could go home and come back with the right amount of money. (A little bit like the man burying the treasure in the field until he could come back and retrieve it). Having got home, I had to raid my piggy bank. Buying the item would use every penny. Was it really worth spending all my pocket money on it? £10 was a lot of money back then!

But, I had set my heart on it. So I set off back to the Church Hall, handed over the money, and walked home very pleased with my purchase.

In case you're wondering what it was, it was a wind up gramophone, complete with several of the old 78 records to play on it!

You may have experienced something similar at some point in your life.

A few years ago, there was real excitement when it was reported that divers had discovered perhaps the largest hoard of treasure ever to be found in a sunken vessel, a pirate ship which went down off the Massachusetts coast in 1717.

People have always been fascinated by rumours of lost or hidden or secret treasure, and great lengths they have gone to in search of it. Perhaps that is why the Bible uses the treasure hunt as an image, a metaphor, for humankind's religious quest. The Old Testament's *Book of Proverbs* declares: "*My son . if you summon discernment to your aid and invoke understanding, if you seek wisdom like silver and dig for her like buried treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and attain to the knowledge of God. [2:1-5].* And Jesus uses it, you remember, as an image for the Kingdom of Heaven: "*The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure lying buried in a field. The man who found it buried it again; and for sheer joy went and sold everything he had, and bought the field.*" [Matt. 13:44].

This metaphor of the search for treasure also underlines the truth that the Christian pilgrimage of faith is one of searching and discovery, which takes us deeper and deeper into the wonder of God's love for us... The hidden treasure of the Gospel, is the amazing and priceless truth, that *God lives in us.*

Following his resurrection, Jesus promised his disciples that he would not leave them comfortless, and at Pentecost they discovered what he meant. His spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, returned not so much to be *with* them as to be *in* them, and now whenever they spoke of Jesus it was of his life living in them. And our belief as Christians is that, if only we will let him, Christ will live and reign in us too, in heart and mind and soul, and empower us to share in growing God's Kingdom.

The promise of the Kingdom is a gift beyond price - the parables of hidden treasure and the perfect pearl remind us that it is something worth setting our hearts on and committing our lives to.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus encourages us to see the Kingdom of Heaven both as ***a future hope and a present reality***. If you remember Jesus said to the criminal crucified alongside him *“today you will be with me in paradise.”* Heaven already exists, Christ is seated in glory, those who have gone before us, already know the joy of being in his presence.

The day will come when the veil between our earthly life and the life of God’s Kingdom will be removed and all peoples will see and know his glory. That is the future hope and promise.

Jesus calls us to share in building his kingdom. Every now and again in this life, we see glimpses of what the life of his kingdom is all about. These might just be very small, but the parable of the mustard seed reminds us that although it is the smallest of seeds, it grows into a tree in which the birds of the air can nest.

Just as the yeast transforms the dough, every act of kindness, generosity, forgiveness, peace and love has the power to transform; and gives us a glimpse of what it will be like to live in a world where life is ordered by the values of God’s kingdom – making heaven both a present reality and a future hope.

In writing his Gospel, Matthew shows himself to be a “scribe of the Kingdom” – showing how Jesus brought new meaning and fulfilment to the promises of old that had been handed down in the Old Testament. Matthew wrote of these things, so that the readers of his Gospel would discover the treasures that Christ offers us as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. Each one of us is called to live out these truths, so that other may come to see and know and share in the treasure too.

Amen.