

Albany Presbyterian Church

July 26th, 2026, Matthew 13: 31-33,44-4-50. Parables of the Kingdom of heaven.

We are once again reflecting on the teachings of Jesus that begin with “The Kingdom of heaven is like. It is a term that we know well, as Matthew 4:17 says Jesus preached the message of repentance and the Kingdom of God. In Matthew, the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of heaven; they are the same. The first readers of Matthew’s gospel were thought to be the Jews, who were reluctant to use the name Yahweh, by dishonouring God.

So, what is the Kingdom of heaven?

Marcus Bogg, in his book “The Heart of Christianity”, says that the Kingdom of God has many meanings. The kingdom of God is the power of God active in Jesus’ ministry of healing. The Kingdom of God is the presence of God. The Kingdom of God is also the community where people live under the power of God, and the Kingdom of God is where we will be at the end of history or beyond history.

I agree with Bogg that the Kingdom of heaven is a spiritual reality where God is the King and Jesus is the Lord; he rules our hearts and minds and teaches us how we live our lives. Frederick Buechner says that the kingdom of God is what we all of us hunger for above all other things. It is where our best dreams come from and our truest prayers. It is the moments when we find ourselves being better than we are and wiser than we know. It is a moment of crisis where we find the strength greater than our own. It is home, where we belong.

Though there is no reference to the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament, the whole scripture is about God being the King of the universe and his rule throughout Israel, where God reign in creation, through covenant and in the prophets. The earthly kingdom was never part of God’s plan; God warns people of the oppressive, exploitative rulers who tried to set themselves in the place of God according to 1 Samuel 9. Yet, God blesses those who rule with the justice and righteousness of God. This is why God was pleased with Solomon; in 1 Kings 3, we read that in his dream, God appears to this young, newly anointed King. When he knew God can give anything in the world, Solomon, in this story, asked for wisdom, things that are not for his own selfish gain, the greatest power, nor the greatest material blessing, but he asks for understanding of minds and *lev shomea*, listening heart, a deep spiritual capacity to listen to God and to discern morally between right and wrong, so that he can govern his kingdom well, with justice and peace of God may rule in his Kingdom. He asks for the ability to listen to the heart, one’s soul’s place of wisdom, which is an inner sanctuary of quiet awareness, deep intuition and stillness. Maybe this is what the Kingdom of God is. Especially in John 17, where the Kingdom of God is spiritual and present, not as some place where you can point to on the map.

But the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, which Jesus came to preach, was clearly a place that stood in opposition to the Kingdom of Caesar and the Kingdom of Herod, of oppression, exploitation and the abusive exercise of power.

Bogg says that the kingdom of heaven must be about God’s reign here on earth; reign in our hearts and lives, here and now. That is why we pray, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as well as in heaven, where God’s justice, not human injustice, and not the transactional peace but God’s mercy and love, rule our hearts and lives and our world.

And it is true that from the smallest of what we do through our daily acts of kindness, prayers and quiet witness to Christ’s love, however small and how slow the changes we might think they bring, God uses them to bring about the greatest changes of the transformation of the world. You know the story of Bob Pierce, back in 1947, an American Minister who one day met an orphan child in China and all he had was his last five dollars in his pocket, and he later on founded World Vision International, which is helping so many people in so many parts of the world.

And we also know that a profound change does not happen quickly; but true social change, and likewise true spiritual growth, require patience and persistent hope. This is what is behind the eco-church movement and prayer for peace at the beginning of our service.

I heard someone talking about a church as a niche; when I wasn't sure, I looked it up; it means a specialized segment of the market, a small but specific product or a place where a person feels comfortable and thrives. I wonder if that is what this man found: a treasure of great value and worth enough to let go of all else to buy that particular treasure. So, Jesus says the Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field or like the finest pearl for the pearl merchants; it is worth giving all you have. They sold everything they had to buy the treasure in the field and the pearl.

C. S. Lewis said that finding God is also finding ourselves; finding his Kingdom is finding where we belong. And there is a great joy in that.

The Kingdom of God is faith in which we align our hearts with God and fill our souls with God, the true source of our worth. It brings real joy to our souls. It comes from the wisdom of God, the acknowledgement of God's love and his kingdom of peace, the place we belong. There is nothing more precious or valuable than that.

And that is what Augustine says in his book Confessions: "You made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until we rest in you."

Though we live in a world of conflicting beliefs, the powers of the world oppress the weak and the humble; the brutality of empire somehow seems to override the quiet, subversive compassion and mercy. But no empire, king, or kingdom lasts, nor does their power and principality endure; and at the end of time, God will gather all people like fish in a net, and he will determine who belongs to his Kingdom and who does not.

It is truly challenging to our minds and our lives, this language of the Kingdom of God, for it is so easy to be distracted by the abusive powers of the empire that we see still. The language of the Kingdom is domineering, controlling, abusive and exploitative; it doesn't fit with our understanding of God as loving, compassionate, forgiving, redeeming and healing. The Kingdom of God is not of this world, but it is in the world. We belong to that Kingdom. It is where God's love, peace and humility rule the hearts and minds.

Today Jesus reminded us that God's reign grows in small and ordinary ways, yet it persists and grows steadily within us, transforming the whole world. It is of greatest value and brings greatest joy if we persevere and have a steadfast faith in that love of God. It will transform our lives with the justice and peace of God, which will flow out of us to change and transform our world.

So may God grant us the minds to understand and hearts that hear it; may we find the reign of God growing steadily and slowly in us, so we may experience the great joy and incredible peace that it brings. And most of all, may we be able to recognise the Kingdom in us, and in our world and live as the people of the Kingdom where God's peace and justice overflow. Amen.