

Call to worship:

As we come into God's presence this morning
Are you ready to hear again about God's kingdom?
Come, open your hearts and minds
To see the kingdom around and within us.
Come and worship the living God.

Praise: Across the lands
You're the Word of God the Father
From before the world began.
Ev'ry star and ev'ry planet
Has been fashioned by Your hand.
All creation holds together
By the power of Your voice.
Let the skies declare Your glory;
Let the land and seas rejoice!

You're the Author of creation;
You're the Lord of ev'ry man;
And Your cry of love rings out across the lands.

Yet You left the gaze of angels,
Came to seek and save the lost,
And exchanged the joy of heaven
For the anguish of a cross.
With a prayer You fed the hungry;
With a word You calmed the sea;
Yet how silently You suffered
That the guilty may go free!

With a shout You rose victorious,
Wresting vict'ry from the grave,
And ascended into heaven,
Leading captives in Your way.
Now You stand before the Father,
Interceding for Your own;
From each tribe and tongue and nation,
You are leading sinners home!

All Age story

We hear about God's kingdom throughout the pages of the Bible, but how do we describe what the kingdom of God is like? One of the ways that Jesus used to help us understand was to tell stories or parables, which provide us with a few clues. God, your kingdom is like:

- G a mustard seed – full of possibilities;
- G yeast – it helps us to grow;
- P treasure – worth searching for;
- P a precious pearl – worth giving everything up for;
- G a net – that is open to everyone.

It's important to ask God to help us to discover these secrets as we read his word. James has prepared a game for us where, if we keep our eyes peeled, we will discover the secret!

Praise: When the sun rises

Prayer

Almighty and sovereign God,
we join together once more to worship you.
Yours is the hand that shaped the universe.
Yours is the power that guides and controls the nations.
Yours is the love that moves and works through all things.
Yours is the purpose that has called us,
that has redeemed us from our sins
that has opened up the way to life,
that has been most perfectly and wonderfully revealed in Christ.

Mighty God,
we worship you.
We offer you our praise.
We bring you our joyful thanksgiving.
We acknowledge you as Lord and master of our lives.
Come amongst us this day with new power,
inspire us with new vision,
fill us with new hope,
and send us out in your service with new purpose. So may we truly live and work for you and your kingdom.

We ask the Lord to forgive those times when our hearts have been fixed on ourselves and not on the kingdom of heaven.

Lord Jesus,
you have won for us the treasure
of forgiveness and life.
Forgive us our ingratitude
when we turn away from you.

Lord Jesus,
you bring us the treasure
of the Father's love.
Forgive us our hardheartedness
when we reject the needs of others.

Lord Jesus,
in the family of your Church
you give us the treasure of
your presence and strength.
Forgive us our apathy
when we fail to spend time with you.

Lord, in your great mercy,
forgive us all our sins
and lead us into everlasting life.
Amen

Offering/Prayer

Reading: Matthew 13:31 – 33; 44 - 52

Sermon – “What is this kingdom like?”

One of the toughest things about a belief in God is trying to talk about it. When you're with a group of like-minded people – not a problem. To strangers – well that's a very different story!

Of course, your life is different because you do believe. In some strange way God seems to make sense to you most of the time, but there are no words that are true enough, right enough, big enough to explain why.

You could talk about how your heart feels full to bursting sometimes, or about how as a Christian you are able to view people through the lens of God's love.

You could talk about how even the worst things that happen to you seem to have a blessing hidden in them somewhere, but the truth is that it is impossible to speak directly about holy things. How can words describe that which is beyond all words?

We could try the next best thing – comparison! Remember all those lessons on poetry which encouraged us to use things like metaphors and similes helped us to describe things more vividly?

We might not be able to explain things exactly, but we could use comparison to try and communicate – falling in love is like drifting along on the evening breeze, and gazing into those azure eyes, as blue as the ocean depths.

Jesus did it all the time. Throughout the Gospels, and in Matthew's Gospel in particular, he was always making comparisons. Sinners are like lost sheep, the word of God is like seed sown on different kinds of ground.....

"The kingdom of heaven is like this...." he said over and over again, telling his followers stories about brides and grooms, sheep and shepherds, wheat and tares.

Sounds good – but why didn't he just come right out and say what he meant? Why did he make these surprising comparisons between holy things and ordinary things, breaking open our everyday understanding of things and inviting us to explore them all over again.

In the passage we have just heard, he makes a number of such comparisons. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, like yeast, like buried treasure, like a fine pearl. The images come quickly, one after the other, with no preparation, no explanation, no time for questions and answers.

The kingdom of heaven is like *this* and *this* and *this*, he says. It is almost like he does not want us to think too much about them, like he does not want us to get stuck on any one of them but to be dazzled by the number and variety of the things the kingdom of heaven is like—like *this* and *this* and *this*.

The first two comparisons seem easy enough. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed or a handful of yeast—nothing much to look at, not very impressive at all, at least not at first.

It is a lot to digest at one sitting, but the striking thing about all of these images is the fact that they are hidden—the mustard seed hidden in the ground, the yeast hidden in the dough, the treasure hidden in the field, the pearl hidden among all the other pearls, the net hidden in the depths of the sea.

If the kingdom is like these, then it is not something obvious, but something that must be searched for, something just below the surface of things waiting there to be discovered.

Like the story of the retired school bus driver takes up rock collecting and spends his weekends at local flea markets looking for interesting stones. One day he picks up a round one, about the size of a walnut, and likes the way it feels in his hand. So, he buys it and takes it home and polishes it up and shows it to his friend the jeweller, who tells him that what he has bought for a pound and a half is a 250-carat ruby.

That special family heirloom, described to you by your grandfather so clearly when you were a child. Missing for years until one day many years later while looking something completely unrelated – there it is! His words come flooding back – this is it – this is what he was talking about.

That is what the kingdom of heaven is like, Jesus says. Whether it begins as a seed hidden in the ground or a treasure hidden in a field, the kingdom comes when it is no longer hidden but revealed, when the tree is full grown, when the treasure chest is opened, when what was lost is found and what was secret is known and what was hidden away is brought forth for everyone to see.

It is exciting business, but where do we begin? Without a treasure map, or an heirloom, or much luck shopping for rubies, where do we start looking for the hidden kingdom of heaven?

All of these metaphors are great, all of these parables about seeds and yeast and nets are very interesting, but when it comes right down to hunting the honest-to-goodness kingdom of heaven, where are we supposed to start?

Surely we need to start in a holy place or reading the words of famous Christians of the past. Maybe we need to look for extraordinary clues *wherever* we are—looking out for heavenly visions, listening out for heavenly voices. Because if the kingdom of heaven is hidden in this world, it is hidden really well, and only the most dedicated detectives among us stand a chance of finding it at all.

Unless, of course, God has resorted to the oldest trick in the book and hidden it where you are right now, or down the road and in the pastry aisle at Lidl.

Could it possibly be that he would hide the kingdom in the last place that any of us would think to look, namely, in the ordinary circumstances of our everyday lives: like a silver spoon in the drawer with the stainless steel ones, the beautiful smelling rose amongst the thorny bush; the extraordinary hidden in the ordinary, the kingdom of heaven all mixed in with everyday life.

Jesus knew it all along. Why else would he talk about heaven in terms of farmers and fields and women baking bread and merchants buying and selling things and fishermen sorting fish, unless he meant somehow to be telling us that the kingdom of heaven has to do with these things?

That our treasure is buried not in some exotic far-off place that requires a special map but that "X" marks the spot right where you are, right now, in all the ordinary people and places and activities of our lives?

If we want to speak of heavenly things, he seems to say, we may begin by speaking about earthly things, and if we want to describe that which is beyond all words, let's begin with words we know, words like *man, woman, field, seed, bird, air, yeast, bread* - words such as *pearl net, sea, fish, joy*.

The kingdom is like these things; the kingdom is found in these things. These are the places to dig for the kingdom of heaven; these are the places to look for the will and presence of God.

Praise: Here is love

Here is love vast as the ocean,
Loving kindness as a flood
When the prince of life our ransom,
Shed for us His precious blood
Who his love will not remember,
Who can cease to sing His praise?
He can never be forgotten,
Throughout heavn's eternal days
On the mount of crucifixion,
Fountains opened deep and wide
Through the floodgates of God's mercy,
Flowed a vast and gracious tide
Grace and love like mighty rivers,
Flowed incessant from above
Heavens peace and perfect justice,
Kissed a guilty world with love
Here is love vast as the ocean,
Loving kindness as a flood
When the prince of life our ransom,
Shed for us His precious blood
Who his love will not remember,
Who can cease to sing His praise?
He can never be forgotten,
Throughout heavn's eternal days

Prayer

We don't see it, but it's everywhere we look;
We don't hear it, but its message is constantly whispered throughout the world;
We can't touch it, but its energy flows through every interaction, every connection.

This Kingdom of Yours, God, is hidden in the ordinary stuff
that makes up our everyday lives;
It's like yeast in a loaf of bread, like a tiny seed that imperceptibly sprouts and grows
in the secret, unseen place;

And while we may miss it, or doubt it, or wonder why it appears weak
in the face of evil,
This Kingdom of Yours exerts an inexorable influence on us
calling us to be more than our selfishness and pride
would lead us to believe we are
leading us to love and serve and connect in ways
that leave us and our world different,
more alive, more real, more whole.

And so, God, we celebrate this hidden Kingdom of Yours
we praise You for its gentle power,
and we open ourselves, once again,
to its life-giving influence.

The ministry entrusted to the Church is to pray for all people,
that they may discover the treasure of faith and communion with God.

We pray for all Christian people that they may hold their faith dear
and continue to love according to the Gospel.

We pray for all people, everywhere,
that they may open their hearts and mind to the good news of the gospel.

We pray for the leaders of the nations as they try to work together on resolving the pandemic,
praying that that they may not lose sight of the poorest countries who don't have access to the
financial and medical resources that we do.

We pray for the sick and for those who care for them
that they might find care and compassion from those around them.

Loving God, we thank you that in your Son Jesus we have found
the treasure which makes our life worthwhile.

Keep us in your love and care, now and always,
and bring us at last to the joys of heaven.

Amen.

Praise: Jesus shall reign

1 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
does its successive journeys run,
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more.

2 To him shall endless prayer be made,
and praises throng to crown his head.
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
with every morning sacrifice.

3 People and realms of every tongue
dwell on his love with sweetest song,
and infant voices shall proclaim
their early blessings on his name.

4 Blessings abound where'er he reigns:
the prisoners leap to lose their chains,
the weary find eternal rest,
and all who suffer want are blest.

5 Let every creature rise and bring
the highest honors to our King,
angels descend with songs again,
and earth repeat the loud amen.

Sending out:

Go in peace;
live the kingdom;
share its treasures;
keep the faith.

And now may God the Father bless you,
God the Son inspire you,
and God the Holy Spirit enlighten you now and always.

Amen.