

One of the things us church folk fear most in ‘times like these’, of accelerating change, is losing what we hold most dear, losing our sense of identity and tradition; afraid that the baby will get thrown out with the bath water. Well here we are, gathered together in a way most of never imagined – for drive-in style Holy Eucharist!

But isn’t it exciting too! for our parish which identifies as ‘pop-up’ church, a people not held together by ‘bricks and mortar’. Gathered as church, the *ekklesia*, defined as assembly of the faith community – this is about as close to the picnic-style Eucharist whereby Jesus fed the 5,000 (or 4,000), but who’s counting!

And I won’t speak for you, but for me personally? I’m hungry and ready to be fed at God’s Table! Although we’ve tried our best to gather, virtually, it’s been 4 long months since we’ve assembled incarnationally, when the pandemic came upon us. What we do today here as Church, isn’t anything we’ve ever done before, and yet it’s always what we’ve done; making meaning of God in Christ through *adiaphora*, the insignificant things of the world – in grains of wheat gathered and juice of grapes pressed.

Church will probably never be the same again, but it may be closer to the way it was and will be. Jesus is quoted in the gospel according to John, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.” Maybe God has more of a ‘Moveable Feast’ in mind, rather than a bolted down table.

Of course, Jesus as a devout Jew had no intention of throwing the baby out with the bath water. But He did radically re-interpret the practice of his faith, in his effort to reveal the Kingdom of God, hidden right under our very noses.

In today’s gospel, after a veritable runaway freight train of parable heaped upon parable, Mathew’s Jesus concludes: “Therefore, every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” (13:52) Stories and parables help us in this way, to hear the same-o same-o as a new song, full of hope!

Ordinarily, I like to unpack this parabolic train, car by car, from engine to caboose, with the help of a few young friends and a few fun props to aid our imagination. But adhering to Covid-19 precautions, instead, we’re going to imagine ourselves amongst the throngs, pressing in, straining to catch a glimpse of this highly controversial Master named Jesus and to hear His perplexing teachings. What are these strange parables he’s throwing at us? Why is he talking this way?

Ahhh, but as time travelers, we've got an edge over the 1st century crowd; scuffling around for the best view, stirring up dust that clings in the heat; craning ears to hear, they didn't have a fabulous new AM radio system!

Matthew gives us 'modern' eavesdroppers a clue: Jesus tells his disciples, "The reason I speak in parables is that 'seeing- they do not perceive and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand."

It's a mixed catch of fish, as we'll later hear in this string of parables. Some fish hope to trap Jesus in his own words, some fish want to swim right back out of that net, and some kind of like what they're hearing and decide to stick around with the school, those who would become disciples!

Jesus blesses his disciples for their openness of heart; seeking to understand God's Word and its relevance to the unfolding Kingdom. "To you it has been given, to know the mystery of the kingdom of heaven." (13:10b)

Wedged together like sardines, what if Jesus holds up that speck of a Mustard Seed? Even if we're practically standing on Jesus toes, close enough to touch his robe, I can't see that seed, without my reading glasses on. Ahhh, and isn't that the point of this first of five parables?

He's holding up a worthless miniscule seed! An invisible, undesirable, infiltrator seed. No one would 'plant' a mustard seed in their field. It's a 'trash' bush, a weed, just get rid of it! Toss it aside in favor of the majestic Cedars of Lebanon.\* They're grand and worth a look. A mustard seed can't compare to the mighty Oaks of Bashan;\* both common imagery in the Hebrew Scriptures. But... the Prophet Isaiah warned that God would cut down the proud and self-righteous. (Is 2:12-13) (Gary Peluso-Verdend in *Feast on the Word Yr. A Vol. 3*, p.286) I cast a glance to my right and to my left, wondering, what if Jesus is inviting me to be the mustard tree?

Many of us in the crowd are deemed by society to be small, insignificant, inconsequential. But didn't I hear Mary's song? God lifts up the humble and lowly?

Yeast too, it's hardly significant, Biblically depicted as undesirable, insidious, but have you noticed that it's nowhere to be found right now absent in aisles of the grocery store, along with paper goods, still?! Well for better or worse, a speck of yeast goes a long way. "Jesus warned against the 'leaven of the Pharisees and Saducees - whose teaching corrupts.'" (Mk 8:14-21 par.; Lk 12:1). St. Paul admonished the Corinthians to remove the 'old leaven' of sin that could infect the whole Church, and exhorted believers to begin anew with the 'unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' (1Cor. 5:6-8). He also warned against legalism, which like leaven will transform the 'whole batch'. (Gal. 5:9)"(Eerdman's, p. 797-8)

Surely, listening to Jesus, we must wonder if the baking sun is getting to him! For why else would Jesus flip-flop, head-over-heels the usual meaning of these undesirable symbols like leaven and mustard seed? Jesus doles out *Son*-glasses, a new lens to give us a glimpse of the Kingdom as God would have it, gospel vision whereby we see the divine in the ordinary, the insignificant and even the rejected things of the world.

We're probably getting overheated and a bit itchy to head home but we stand rooted firmly in place, as a light flickers within our consciousness, a burgeoning and blossoming hope that grows from the smallest and humblest beginnings- a tiny seed and a pinch of leaven.

Now seemingly suddenly off-topic, Jesus is talking about Hidden Treasure and Pearls of great value? The woman standing next to me with a confused look on her face asks, "Why would you go and hide your treasure in someone else's field in the first place?!! Good point! But then I remind her, didn't just last week we hear him talking about The Sower, who planted his seeds out in the field of the world?

More questions swirl in our heads: What if... the treasure is Jesus? And God the Merchant, Who bought for everyone in the world, the Kingdom of God so that all of us flowers of the field can truly live? Maybe I am a pearl of great value in the eyes of God.

And now we come to the catch, pun intended! Even though I doubt many of us now, cast nets for a living; my neighbors that I'm standing shoulder to shoulder with in 1st century Palestine do!

Jesus has shifted gears, again! Honestly! Am I the only one having trouble keeping up with Him? The Net. End of Age. Sorting. Looking around at the odd assortment of us, swarming around Jesus, it strikes me that we're like the mixed lot of fish that all get caught up with one great sweep of the net. But at this point, I'm not so sure which fish are keepers and which get tossed! Because so far, everything this man Jesus has said, casts doubt on everything I ever known so far. Everything is topsy-turvy as I know it. And it's the small things that God treasures in this new Kingdom unlike any kingdom on earth. Hmm, I'm greatly hoping I'm a minnow in this story!

At least I'm clear on one thing, I'm not the one pulling up the net and I'm not an angel doing the sorting. That's out of my hands!

Jesus is done and the crowd begins to disperse. No one is talking much, it seems we're all lost in our own thoughts. There's been so much to take and ponder. As I scuffle along, thirsty and hungry, one continuous thread in the parables seems to be:

that which is viewed by the world as small and insignificant is of great value and that even the smallest and insignificant actions have great consequences.

Mary's Song floats back into my mind. The high and the mighty will be cut down. The lowly will be lifted up... I'm jolted back to my surroundings, as Jesus calls out to his disciples, "Have you understood all this?" he asked. "Yes!" they shout back. (13:51) Yes?!!??

"Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." (13:52) You are a scribe in training. I am a scribe in training. Each of us has a treasure to share and you know what that treasure is.

Suddenly, I spy a coin. The kingdom of heaven is like a penny. By itself it is worthless. Insignificant. Even undesirable. As I wander along, I begin to notice... a penny here, a penny there. I pick it up, first one - then many. Before I know it, I hold such an abundance that I can do naught else but share it with others.

*Amma Susan*