

Based on Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Jesus put before the crowds another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." And he said to them, "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."

My favorite part of this passage is the end where the people say, "yes Jesus, we understand." As the rest of Matthew's gospel (not to mention all the Epistles of the New Testament) make clear, they really didn't.

Sometimes Jesus seems to suggest that to live as he asks is onerous and difficult; he says we should be perfect, he says his way is a yoke and a burden (though a relatively easy yoke, but still...) or that it is like carrying the crucifixion crosspiece to your own place of execution. But here Jesus speaks about the Gospel life a little differently. What is reassuring about this passage is Jesus' own acknowledgement that we aren't perfect and that as humans, we often fall short.

We don't have to have perfect faith, just a little bit – maybe only as much as a tiny seed-worth of faith. But here is crux of what Jesus is saying – that we need to put that little seed of faith to work. It is not enough to just *believe in* Jesus, you have to *be like* Jesus, at least to the best of your ability.

The abundant life Christ is offering is greater than anything and is the only pathway to the life we desire now as well as the eternal life we hope for beyond death. But to achieve it, we have to act as though we already have it. We have to move beyond our fears, beyond our anxieties, beyond our selfishness, and beyond our disbelief and embrace our faith with our whole selves. We have to take up whatever faith we can muster with "with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength."

Faith, Jesus tells us, is something we *do*. The mustard seeds don't protect the birds, the mustard bush does. We need to plant the seed to grow the bush; likewise, we need to enact our faith for the kingdom to grow, both within us and in the world. God has created all of us with certain abilities and gifts; Jesus invites us to use them to our fullest ability for the building of the kingdom. And it matters not whether our gifts are deemed large or small by the world, because in the kingdom of God, there are no unimportant roles – all are needed, and welcomed.

