

Gospel, Sermon and Prayers for Trinity 7 2020 “New and Old Treasures”

(for use with the weekly order of service “Jesus the Hope of the World”)

Gospel

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

³¹ He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³² 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.”

The Parable of the Yeast

³³ He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with ³⁴ three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

Three Parables

⁴⁴ “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.

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Treasures New and Old

⁵¹ “Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.”

⁵² 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.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord

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Storytelling is key to the way we understand our faith. Abstract theology is all very well and important, but stories are what get to the heart of the matter. So our Gospels are full of Jesus telling stories, because they are what makes sense to us.

Our gospel reading this morning is compiled of a whole load of stories, coming thick and fast, one after another. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed – it’s like yeast – it’s like treasure in a field or a pearl of great price – it’s like a net that is thrown out to catch fish. I do wonder if these short sayings have been collected a bit out of context – it’s hard to imagine Jesus reeling them off one after another like we’ve just heard. But they do all contain important insights into the nature of God’s kingdom and Jesus’ part in it.

But it would be an impossible task to try to cover each of these profound sayings in one sermon, so this morning I’m going to be talking about perhaps the last, and probably least discussed and least preached on of these parables.

Jesus said

“Every scribe who has been trained for the Kingdom of Heaven is like someone who brings out new and old treasures from the storeroom”

This parable makes me think of our attics and our garages – full of the things that we put out of sight for now, but can’t bring ourselves to throw away. It brings to mind an image of someone finally sorting things out – reminiscing about the old days perhaps – realising the importance of some treasures and that some things we thought were worth saving have turned out to be rubbish. Sometimes it’s the only way to ascertain something’s value – put it away for a while and get it out later.

The last few months have largely been an exercise in putting things away carefully for safe keeping. For

many weeks our Churches were entirely closed, and we were forced to discover new treasures in the shape of online worship and phonecalls and video calls with friends and relations. For some of us, the old treasures are cautiously being brought back out into the living room; for others the new treasures are having to continue to do their job.

It will be interesting to see which, if any, of the old treasures might prove to have outlived their usefulness when we return to a new normal. But most of them will continue to prove essential to our faith – in particular our sacramental and musical heritage – missed for now, but always part of who we are.

Matthew talks a lot about the balance between old and new in his Gospel. He is a Jewish writer, writing for a Jewish readership, and he is keen to stress the continuity between what Jesus is doing and the story of the Israelites told in the scriptures for a thousand years beforehand. It is true that the relationship between old and new is not straightforward – as Christians we do not keep strict Kosher law, and we inevitably interpret the scriptures in a very different

way to how they were understood two and half thousand years ago. But we do belong to the family of the Abrahamic faiths, and we share a family likeness. The story of God's choosing the whole of humanity begins with the choosing of a particular nation at a particular time. It is our oldest treasure, and so we still read what we usually refer to as the Old Testament or the Hebrew Scriptures, week in week out. Despite the changes in society and our interpretation of events and laws, we can still learn from these ancient texts.

The new treasures Jesus is talking about, are his own teaching and ministry, and the promise of the Holy Spirit to continue to guide the people God throughout all time. God's revelation to us is progressive. We don't wake up one morning and suddenly understand all there is to know. We grow, we mature, we change our minds, we listen to others, we discover that there are new ways to live and to understand life, some of which are better than the old ways.

Jesus' parable could very reasonably have a post script added to it: that of not throwing the baby out with the bath water. By which I mean -

New insight is important. Christians are called to be constantly open to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us right here and right now in the community and the time that we live in – and sometimes that will call for radical change of mind or radical change of action. But old insight is essential too. Whilst society can have a tendency to move on to the next thing with little reference to the past, the truth is that we dismiss the wisdom of our forefathers at our peril and the traditions of Christian worship to our great detriment. At this time of enforced spiritual fasting that has sometimes felt more like a spiritual famine, we are grateful for new technology and new ideas that have enabled us to continue to be connected, but we also, quite rightly, look with yearning to those old treasures in the attic, recognising their deep resonance with the human condition and the necessary part they play in our lives.

We have learnt what a great privilege it is to meet together to worship. We will never take receiving

communion for granted again. We will never sing a hymn again without genuinely giving thanks to God. When we are able once more to share the peace with our neighbour with a handshake or a kiss or a hug, we will know ourselves to be a people who love and who are loved.

I refuse to believe that the things we are missing have gone for ever, because they are essential to our humanity and our lives as children of God. They are safe in the storeroom, and along with the new treasures we discover, they are gifts from God – sacraments – signs of his presence – demonstrations of his love. Christians have a responsibility to hand on the gifts of the traditions and foundations of our faith to the next generation, whilst humbly being open to the new insights that the next generation have to bring to us. Jesus asks us to walk in the same in-between space that he did – one which upholds the old and engages with the new – even when the new is unknown and unasked for. It is a challenging place to stand, but it is in old treasures and in new that we will find our God. This, says Jesus, is what becoming a disciple in the Kingdom of heaven is like.

As we wait for God's Kingdom to break into our world and heal us, we are all called to be custodians of the old and the new. Together, we wait with faith for the old foundations of our faith to be restored to us; together we live through the present and look to the future with hope and with trust in him.

Intercessions

Let us by prayer and intercession with thanksgiving make our requests to God.

Heavenly Father, help us to appreciate treasures old and treasures new. Help us to trust in your unfailing presence – to recognise you in our past, to trust you in our present, and to work with you for our futures. R

Gracious God, we pray for peace, justice, healing and reconciliation throughout the world. We give thanks for all who are working to make this world a better place – for medics and researchers, for those who teach, for those who are seeking to provide support and relief for refugees and those whose basic needs are unmet, especially in this current time of crisis. We pray for the honouring of human rights, and for the relief of the oppressed. And we give

thanks for all that is gracious in the lives of men, women and children. R

We pray for the renewal of the Church in faith, love and service. We pray for Archbishop Stephen, Bishops Nick and Helen Anne, Archdeacon Jonathon and for the life of our United Parish Churches. Help us to work together, in faith and trust celebrating our common purpose with our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus. We give thanks for the gift of your word, the grace of the sacraments and the fellowship of your people. R

We pray for the Church and people of our Parish, and for all people in their daily life and work. We pray for any people in our communities who are anxious or afraid, for any who are troubled about the future, or harbour regrets about the past. Help them to live with courage, one day at a time and to find meaning and purpose as they move forward. We pray for the young and the elderly, for families, and all who are alone. We give thanks for good relationships and all that reveals your loveliness, and pray for your reconciliation, hope and Godly purpose, wherever there is distress. R

We pray for those who are in need; for the sick, sorrowful and bereaved. May your Church be a beacon of hope, and your people be a means of healing and reconciliation. We give thanks for all who bring comfort, care and healing and ask your blessing on them, giving thanks for human love and friendship and for all that enriches our daily lives.
R

Let us commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray, to the mercy and protection of God.

Collect

Generous God,
You give us gifts and make them grow:
Though our faith is as small as a mustard seed,
Make it grow to your glory
And the flourishing of your Kingdom;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen