

## July 30, 2023: Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

**Main Idea: The kingdom of God does not exist on its own, separate from God's people. In understanding the kingdom, we are called to build up the kingdom.**

In our gospel text this week, Jesus provides multiple parables to describe the kingdom of God. It's like we've been handed a basket of eclectic ingredients on the television show Chopped, and now we have to make a meal out of them. We have to make them mean something all together. So—what are the commonalities between a mustard seed, yeast, treasure hidden in a field, a fine pearl and a net filled with fish?

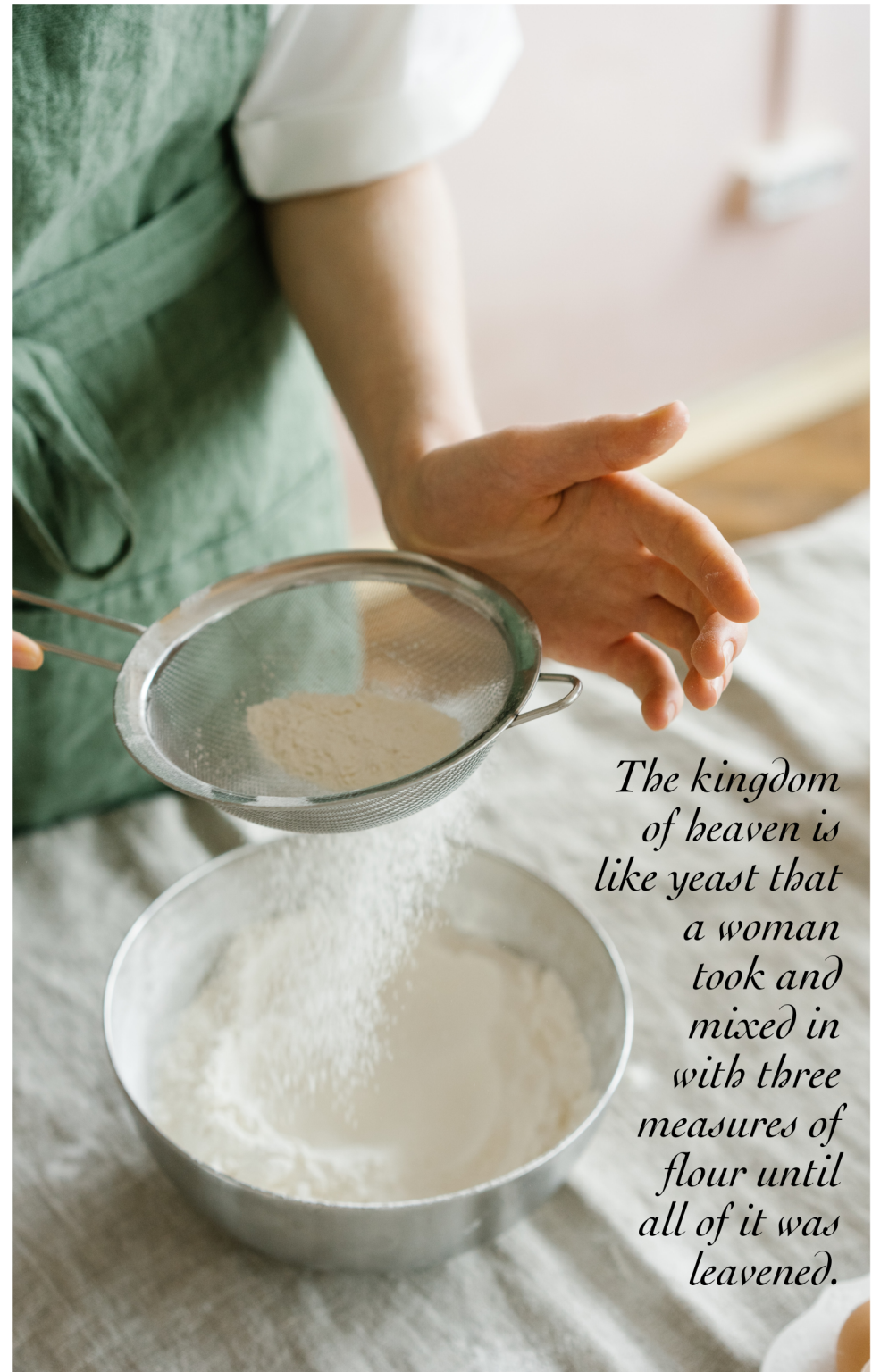
The first is rapid growth. A tiny mustard seed becomes a giant tree; a speck of yeast mixed with flour rises up into full loaves of bread; an uncovered treasure brings richness where once there was just wilderness; a fine pearl offers more than an entire collection of pearls once did; an empty net is all of the sudden filled with fish “of every kind.” We can safely say, then, that the kingdom of God is a kingdom of surprise. Maybe even subversion. By its nature, it will keep us on our toes.

Perhaps more important than that is the second commonality: that of value. A tree, for example, is not just impressive because it grew from a tiny seed. It's impressive because it shelters pieces of creation and feeds into a thriving ecosystem. Bread is the baseline nourishment for people all around the world. A treasure so grand that it allows you to sell everything else in your possession to relocate and reorient your life is quite a treasure. Same goes for a pearl whose value usurps the value of all of your other pearls, combined. And a net full of fish that provides you with the luxury of judging which is good and which is bad when just a few minutes before you had nothing? That is quite a net of fish.

The final commonality is the fact that people are involved in each of the metaphors Jesus uses. People in their everyday lives and occupations are inseparable from the notion of the kingdom of God. People build it up. People maintain it. People make huge decisions within, about and because of it. People are nourished by it. People share it. Jesus's descriptions of the mustard seed, the yeast, the treasure the pearl and the fishnet are really something of a call—a call to build and refine the kingdom with everything we have.

### Scripture Summary

Jesus often taught using parables. We can enter into those parables with varying experiences of understanding. We can get glimpses of what the kingdom of heaven may be like as we listen.



*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.*

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## GOD'S WORD for Today

### First Reading: Genesis 29:15-28

<sup>15</sup>Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?” <sup>16</sup>Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. <sup>17</sup>Leah’s eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. <sup>18</sup>Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” <sup>19</sup>Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.” <sup>20</sup>So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. <sup>21</sup>Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.” <sup>22</sup>So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. <sup>23</sup>But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. <sup>24</sup>(Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) <sup>25</sup>When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?” <sup>26</sup>Laban said, “This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. <sup>27</sup>Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” <sup>28</sup>Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

### Psalm: Psalm 105:1-11, 45b or Psalm 128

### Second Reading: Romans 8:26-39

<sup>26</sup>Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup>And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. <sup>28</sup>We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to

be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. <sup>30</sup>And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. <sup>31</sup>What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup>He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup>Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.” <sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### Gospel: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

<sup>31</sup>He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; <sup>32</sup>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.” <sup>33</sup>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.” <sup>44</sup>“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. <sup>45</sup>“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; <sup>46</sup>on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. <sup>47</sup>“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; <sup>48</sup>when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. <sup>49</sup>So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup>and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>51</sup>“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” <sup>52</sup>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.”