

This morning Jesus presents five parables, or images, of the kingdom to help us understand just what this is, and what life will be like once we embrace it.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed – the smallest of seeds, sown well, which grows into something extraordinary, with a place for living creatures of every kind, transforming a multitude of lives.

Likewise, the Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast mixed with flour that grows beyond all expectations, much like the five loaves and two fish that fed five-thousand men, plus women and children.

The merchant already knows the value of the fine pearl, as does the one who found treasure in the field, and so they do all they can, sell all they have, in order to possess it. Desiring the Kingdom of Heaven will push us to do the same – give up every other thing for the thing that has immeasurable value.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, catching fish of every kind – the extravagance of which is symbolic of the extravagance of God’s providence for all of creation.

Heaven often leads us to thinking about life after death. But that isn’t what Jesus is describing.

About fifteen years ago I went to Taizé with a group of RI youth. Taizé is in France, and it is a Christian community devoted to prayer and study. Each day we gathered, multiple times, for worship, which consisted of singing repetitive chants, like we sometimes do here, and one of my favorites went like this:

*The Kingdom of God is justice and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Come Lord and open in us the gates of your kingdom.*

The Kingdom of God is justice and peace, and joy – sounds pretty inviting, doesn’t it? Especially today. What would each of us give to live in justice, peace, and joy, every day and always? Isn’t this what we pray for, “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven?” If we are invited by Jesus, led by Jesus, to life in God’s kingdom now, it is God’s justice, peace, joy, and love, which we so deeply desire in our lives even now.

Paul’s letter to the Romans includes some of his most familiar and comforting words. And while we tend to think of the Kingdom of God as only sometime in the future, Paul wants us to know that because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we can live in it now. As Christians, followers of Jesus, we’re actually supposed to live in it now. This is what we pray for every time we say, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

In Eric Atcheson’s book, *On Earth as it is in Heaven: A Faith-based Toolkit for Economic Justice* he posits most societal problems we have either stem from or are the cause of economic injustice. Every problem that gets reported on the nightly news is somehow wrapped up in economic injustice. As Christians, as followers of Jesus, we’re supposed to embrace God’s Divine Economy,

where everyone has what they need and no one goes without. Where one job is sufficient to feed, clothe, and shelter a family, even if both adults work; everyone has access to affordable healthcare so health challenges don't take a disproportionate toll on the poor; where gender or skin color are not barriers for equal pay for equal work, or housing or education; and the rich don't get richer by wielding power of exploitation over others. The Divine Economy is a just economy.

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Open in us the gates of your kingdom; from the moment we are baptized we have a role to play in opening the gates of God's kingdom, for ourselves, and for others. Sometimes it's hard to know how, the problems we face are too overwhelming. Here is Paul's antidote: "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. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints (that's us) according to the will of God."

More often than not, my prayer these days is "Lord, make it stop!" The Spirit can fill in the blanks. Jesus will intercede. God will answer, because, again in the words of Paul, "If God is for us, who is against us?" And, "all things work together for the good of those who love God."

If we see something that doesn't appear "heaven-like" that is something to pray away. If we see something that reminds us of the grace and hope and joy of God's kingdom, we rejoice and give thanks through our prayer, because that is the experience of God's Kingdom love on earth, now present in our lives.

Of course, we pray not just with our words, but also with our hands and our feet. In the words of Civil Rights icon John Lewis, we make "good trouble" in order to transform the world into one of justice and peace, and joy. Even our baptismal covenant calls us to make "good trouble." And isn't that exactly what Jesus did, make good trouble amid the Roman Empire and the Temple authorities, to bring about God's justice and peace in his present age and in every age to come?

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*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

Amen.