

Have you understood all this? Have you understood all this, St Martin's? Right, me neither. I love it when our scripture contains a joke, a joke at the expense of the disciples, and us. Because who can ever fully understand a parable? When can we ever get out of these stories all there is to learn? That is one reason we keep coming back here, to question, and puzzle together, to ask what these stories of Jesus have to say to us, today.

In these past three weeks we have heard many stories from Jesus about the kingdom of heaven and its abundance. From the sower getting an amazing harvest even when seeds are lost, to a healthy crop of wheat growing right among the weeds. To today, the weedy and invasive mustard seed bush, growing from a tiny seed. And a bit of yeast that can leaven a big pile of flour, enough to make many loaves of bread.

Using different images, Jesus tells us that we can help God build the kingdom of heaven even if we are small, even if we are scrappy and not the most attractive plant in the garden, even if conditions are not ideal, and most of all, even if there are problems, challenges, evil, around us.

And there are certainly challenges, certainly questions and even evil in our world today. Ongoing war in Iran and Gaza and Ukraine. The disturbing death of 18-year old Nolan Wells in Mississippi. The disquieting news, especially for St Martin's Immigrant and Refugee Committee, that the government plans to interview hundreds of Afghani refugees.

How do we keep growing the kingdom of heaven in this context? How do we stay hopeful? How do we grow our connections to each other and our neighbors?

Jesus says, "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."

Jesus is giving instructions, a recipe, for building God's kingdom. We are to open our treasure boxes and pull out our tools, our gifts, the new and the old.

The new and the old.

How do we respond to the weeds in our world? How are we to be church in these times? Where is God calling us to be right now? Jesus answers, bring out the new and the old.

The new and the old. FIFA captivated many of us this past week with the new and the old. Lamine Yamal versus Messi. A new star-studded halftime show for the final. Or maybe folks like me, who had been ignorant and asleep to the worldwide phenomenon of soccer, are the new. In any case, it was a stirring final, an exciting finish to these weeks that have brought together this city and the Americas in such a hope-filled way.

The new and the old. There is a new version of The Odyssey out, with a multicultural cast and a soundtrack using ancient Greek instruments. Right here in Philly at CAPA there is a new production of the musical 1776 by professional-level high school students, including St Martins' member Sage, acting out history that still feels very fresh and timely these 250 years after the signing of the Declaration.

Matthew's own Gospel is full of the new and old. It contains the most quotes from the Hebrew scriptures of the four Gospels. And Jesus is saying here to the crowd that we must apply the law to our own times, to the kingdom of right here. What does the law ask of us in these times? What do the instructions from Deuteronomy and Leviticus mean for us now? How are we to love God and our neighbor today?

The new and the old. This is why we come here, week after week. This is why we pray together and read these old, old stories together. This is the why of our Bible study and Worship Reflections and quiet days and personal prayer. And we know this, St Martin's. We are a community that prays with our hearts and voices and minds, and also with our hands and feet.

The new and the old. Praying and studying and acting in the world. This is how we go forward as a community, how we respond to these times, how we grow the kingdom of heaven. It is how we will do everything from air conditioning this sanctuary, to continuing and growing our 9:00 service, to sustaining our work with our neighbors from Afghanistan and our partners in Allegheny West and Germantown

and Guatemala, to discerning what ministries will call us to respond next. We will not have the same fundraising strategy or the 9:00 service or Adult Forum some of us so fondly remember, or the same ways of doing ministry that we can comfortably fall back on.

We will not always be sure of the way forward. There will be surprises. We will feel confused, overwhelmed, frightened, even angry and in grief for the loss of the old. We will feel anxious, angry and impatient that we are still in the old, that we haven't gotten to the new thing yet.

The new and the old. When we are unsure of what we are doing, when we are overwhelmed with our feelings, when we are tangled in the weeds, we can hold onto Paul's words in the letter to the Romans we heard today. Paul asks, Who will separate us from the love of Christ? And he answers his question, saying that nothing, not death, not anything in our future, not powers, nothing in creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

St Martin's as we go forward, let us remember that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing. Not microbursts, smoky skies, tornado warnings, excessive heat, not wars, not anything we may face ahead, the joyful or the difficult. Let us continue together, helping make real God's abundance, sowing the seeds, moving among the weeds, bringing out the new and the old as we grow God's kingdom here on Earth. Amen.