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Homily on Matthew 13:44-50, “Kingdom Living”  
Sunday, May 31, 2015

Did you see yourself in the Kingdom? Are you the one who stumbled upon the treasure in a field? Or were you the merchant out shopping and found “The One!”? Or did you see yourself standing on the edge of a boat, fishing and catching so much you didn’t know what to do? Maybe you didn’t see yourself anywhere.

When we read parables like this we often attempt to place ourselves within the story as one of the characters. Am I someone who could walk around town and find a treasure in a field? Or am I more of a shopper who can spot a great deal? Or am I someone who needs to have a grab bag of stuff in order to find what I’m looking for? As I read these parables this week I began to see that Jesus invites these explorations. He wants you to see the Kingdom through your eyes—because he wants you to be who God called you to be. The world calls you to be something different—to change your looks, update your resume or alter your lifestyle—in order to find happiness or success or notoriety. God calls you to live your life—the Kingdom will find you no matter the amount of money in your bank account or what your business card says or how big your house is.

A few inevitable questions that arise with these parables is: how do we know where to look? What are we supposed to look for? On the surface these parables make us believe we need to head out to the fields or to the marketplace or out to sea. Some of us would love to do one or all three of those. I can see folks shifting in their seats as they think to themselves, “Did the pastor just invite me to go play in the fields or go shop or head to the water? Honey, did you hear what he said? Honey, if the pastor says I’m supposed to do those things, I can’t disappoint.”

Pace yourself for a little bit and let’s explore more deeply what Christ was telling his listeners.

Instead of trying to force yourself into one of the stories, what if we broadened the categories to reveal what I believe Christ was saying. Christ speaks of three distinctly broad categories of people with these parables: the wanderers, the traditionalists and the seekers.

Some of you might be wanderers. You aren’t exactly sure what you are looking for but you are out and about paying attention to what’s around you. At some point you think about the joys and benefits of a life of faith, but for one reason or another you haven’t fully committed. Then something happens.

Call it luck or fate or God’s Providence—call it whatever you want; for some reason you end up in a church. Maybe it is because of a funeral or a wedding or an event held at the church. You weren’t thinking of much other than enjoying the experience (or dreading it!), but once you arrived you knew something was different.

You saw something or heard something or smelled something and it made you lean in and sense something was there. Then you saw it or heard it or smelled it and you knew you’d discovered some kind of treasure you wanted—in fact, you needed it. It was what we call a “gut feeling” moment. Maybe it was the friendliness of the place or the words spoken or how the music hit your ears—whatever it was, you were hooked and you’ve been in the church—or had a life of faith— since.

You were like the man who walked by a field and saw a treasure and did everything he could to buy it. He wasn't looking for it, but the Kingdom found him.

Others of you might be traditionalists. You've always known exactly what you wanted and you know how to look and where to look and how to bargain for what you need. You don't need to window shop, because you know what you like and where to find it. On the flip side, you know exactly what you don't like. You are comfortable telling people that isn't your cup of tea, but thanks for asking.

Maybe you were a born and bred Presbyterian and you knew all along that you'd be in a Presbyterian Church—you just had to find the right one. Or maybe you are a recovering Catholic or Baptist and you know what you don't like. Whatever you are, you know what you like and you can tell immediately. You don't need to waver or wonder or create a pros and cons list. You are the merchant who is out shopping for pearls and once you find "The One!" you do everything in your power to obtain it.

You were looking for a specific item and when the Kingdom appeared within it, you did everything in your power to get it.

And finally, others of you might be seekers. You don't wander as aimlessly as the wanderers, but you aren't as selective as the traditionalists. You are pretty comfortable with most things, but don't mind having a grab bag of items from which you might choose. Malls are a good thing in your mind because they give you an assortment of options and you like that.

Like the fishermen you cast your net widely and then once you see all your options you start weeding out the good and the bad. You are comfortable with the practice of "church-shopping" and find a few good and bad things about every place.

You could be categorized as *decisively indecisive*—you know what you want, but you like to weed out the others before making the final choice. Or you joined the church because you married into it—maybe your spouse or love interest was in the church so you thought, "why not?" Or maybe you all compromised. One of you was Episcopalian and the other Baptist and you thought Presbyterian was a good middle ground.

Or maybe you are someone who falls into another category. One that isn't described in these parables. These weren't the only parables Jesus spoke and they certainly don't encompass the full reality of the Kingdom. What they do is invite us to see ourselves within the confines of the Kingdom.

These parables open up a Kingdom we can't fathom. It is big enough for all of us, yet catered to our individuality. And that's the way Christ intended it to be.

We often relate the Kingdom to heaven. It is natural and there are logical arguments that support this line of thinking. But we must tread lightly whenever we make that connection. Embedded within that line of thinking is the idea that we have to do something or be something or act a certain way in order to gain entrance into the Kingdom, aka heaven.

These parables highlight something Jesus proclaimed loud and clear—The Kingdom of God is at hand. It is everywhere and it wants you to find it. It is in the fields, in the marketplace and out on boats. But it is in other places too. The Kingdom finds us in our everyday, normal lives. Whether we are wanderers, traditionalists, seekers or something completely different—God's Kingdom finds us.

But don't believe that once you find the Kingdom all is well. It is a commitment to something different. Your life will change once you see and buy into the Kingdom.

Many of us might think we need to sell everything in order to obtain the Kingdom—as two of these parables highlight that’s how those folks held on to it. But remember Jesus loved using exaggerations to get his point across.

If he told you that you only needed to save one months salary in order to purchase the field or only needed to listen create a budget in order to afford the finest pearl or if he told you that you could fish every day and catch one fish at a time in order to separate the good from the bad—would you invest your life in those treasures? Maybe, but I’d imagine you would lose interest pretty quickly.

Christ wants more than your interest—he wants your life. And he’ll do whatever he can to show you the Kingdom in order that you see what it means to live within it. When you think about giving up everything you have—everything that keeps you secure and safe and happy—or at least provides the illusions of those things—you start to sense what it means to follow Christ. You start to imagine how different your life would be if you only owned a field with a treasure or the finest pearl or were able to separate the good from the bad whenever you fished. The Kingdom grabs you and invites you to think and live differently.

But it also invites you to be yourself. Because the power of the Kingdom is that God can transform us no matter the circumstances. WE don’t have to be something different in order to find the Kingdom—it is everywhere. So it is important to note that if you don’t like fishing, then don’t head out to buy a fishing rod and force yourself to catch everything in the sea in order to find the Kingdom; and don’t go shopping if that is your idea of hell on earth; and please don’t go walking around fields if you are fair-skinned and hate the outdoors and don’t know where hunters hunt but you want to search for the kingdom in a field.

Be who God called you to be. Jesus and the Spirit will find you—they’ll show you the Kingdom. And if you are paying attention you notice immediately that something is different because you are different. You’ll start to think and dream and live differently. Welcome to Kingdom Living. There’s nothing else like it.

May God bless this witness and this congregation. Amen.