

“The Kingdom is Like...” based on Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52
Aspen Community United Methodist Church
July 24, 2011

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I would like to enter into this conversation about the kingdom -
the kingdom of God – the kingdom of Heaven -
this space of God – this divine space -
with a story.

I have told you the story before -
but it bears telling more than once.

The story is about a diamond thief – a very good diamond thief -
who wanted to steal only the most exquisite of gems.¹

The thief would hang around the diamond district
to see who was purchasing a gem –
so that he could pick their pocket.

One day he saw a well-known diamond merchant
purchase the jewel
he had been waiting for all his life.

It was the most beautiful – the most pristine – the purest of diamonds.
He was very excited – and so he followed the diamond merchant
as he boarded the train -
and got into the same compartment.

The diamond thief spent an entire three-day journey
trying to pick the merchant’s pocket
and obtain the diamond.

When the end of the journey came
and he had not found the gem - he was very frustrated.

He was an accomplished thief –
And although he had used all his skills –
he still was not able
to steal this rare and precious jewel.

When the diamond merchant got off the train -
the pickpocket followed him once again.
Finally – he just couldn’t stand it any more.
He walked up to the merchant and said:

“Sir – I am a renowned diamond thief.
I saw you purchase the beautiful diamond -
so I followed you onto the train.

Though I used all the skills of my art -
which I have perfected over many years -

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I have not been able to find the gem.

Tell me your secret.
Tell me please – how did you hide it from me?”

The diamond merchant replied:
“Well – I saw you watching me in the diamond district.
And – I suspected you were a pickpocket.
So I hid the diamond
where I thought you would be least likely to look for it -
in your own pocket!”

He reached into the thief’s pocket and pulled out the diamond.



Let’s think today about the inner life of our faith -
because the inner life of faith becomes the outer life of faith.

The outer life of faith becomes
what we are and do in the world that makes a difference -
sometimes a great difference -
even if it begins small.

The kingdom of God
is a spiritual reality within us
that may need to be described psychologically
insofar as how we experience it
in the unfolding of our personalities.

When we find and realize the kingdom within ourselves
we begin to experience a growing wholeness -
wrote John Sanford, the Jungian analyst and Episcopal Priest.²

As we grow in this way we live fuller lives.
We grow in body, mind, and spirit - we might say.

We are more attuned to God’s voice I our lives -
and the call of God in our lives.

The story of the diamond thief is good to keep telling
because it is so human to look outside ourselves
for meaning and for happiness.

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We all search for happiness.
We search for fulfillment.
Sometimes that instinct is stronger than the instinct to survive.

The search can take many avenues.
It may be in a search for pleasure or comfort or security
or for some position among all this herd of humanity -
as one of my teachers wrote.

Usually when we have accomplished some level of success
in terms of pleasure or comfort or security or position -
we recognize that none of it truly satisfies a deeper command.

And yet – we are often afraid that we will loose
whatever pleasure or comfort or security or position -
or parts of those things at least.

There is a deeper call for happiness.
and yet a fear of losing whatever peace and happiness we have attained.
And that causes a real tightness within us -
a contraction to which we try to hold.

Maybe we develop a deep distrust -
and cynicism about whether
peace and happiness are really possible.



But sometimes – in a blessed life -
there arises the call of the spiritual search – the search for God.
We might call it a search for truth.

And – we go after that in the same manner
as we have gone after everything else.
And those methods don't work very well.

We turn towards the spiritual life.

Now our usual way of doing things will try to take over.
But our usual way of doing things -
will take us in the wrong directions.

We might look for spiritual pleasure – or spiritual comfort -
or spiritual knowledge.
We might follow around a spiritual guru – or spend days in meditation -
seeking that pleasure – that comfort – some kind of new knowledge.
But that search gets old.

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Perhaps it is like the diamond thief
following the diamond merchant all that way.

We may have finally learned that God is present – and that may be new -
but until we realize that has been there all the time -
we are still looking for God to make us happy.

But that’s based on a rather infantile understanding of what God is -
some thing – some force – some place
that can deliver everlasting pleasure and comfort and security.

Because as long as we are looking somewhere for happiness -
we are overlooking what it is.

As long as we are seeking to find God someplace -
we are overlooking the essential truth of God -
which is constant presence – all presence.

And we are also overlooking our own nature - which is happiness.³
The kingdom of God is to discover the true nature of you -
God right there within you.



The Kingdom of God – the Kingdom of Heaven -
is best described as “like” something.
And that is why Jesus taught about it in similes -
or little parables.



That the idea of heaven far away and later
was invented by travel agents with tickets to sell.⁴

We can let them make their expeditions to other places.
Perhaps from far off places or after expensive thrills -
they’ll find their way home with new wonder.

But Jesus has no far-off land in mind.
The kingdom of heaven – the realm of God is not removed -
but always inside something – hidden -
close at hand – underground – underwater – under your nose.

It’s right here in this room – and in your church back home too.
It is in the person beside you.

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It's everywhere.

We just pay more attention in places like this one.
The people who built this church
wanted to make a special place where we would pay attention.
And we do.
And we hope to continue paying attention.
That is why we want to restore it for the next generation.
That's what *Generation to Generation* is about
at The Community Church.



Heaven is not up bit in.
It is the seed of the world – the soul and heart of all things.
The realm of heaven is the heart of a cry -
the energizing dream -
the love in a love song -
like the songs Rick sang last night.

God is the center of all things.
It is like light -
and you radiate from its light -
like laughter – like the smell of a rose.

The mustard seed vibrates with life
and becomes the million things you see.

As the pearl lies in the oyster – when you reach the center -
you are there too
at the heart of each moment.



Carl Jung had an inscription on the doorway of his home.
It said “Bidden or unbidden – God is present.”

It captures the same mystical maybe mischievous dimension of God
revealed in everyday events.

Jesus was so very attentive to this in his life and his teachings.

He taught that the Kingdom of God (literally the heavens) -
the Divine domain – is like a minute micron of a mustard seed -
a hidden treasure found while walking across a field -
a precious pearl worth ones entire portfolio -
a net straining with every kind of fish imaginable -
so large a catch that you must sift through to get the good ones.

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This is like the gem hidden in the pocket of the one who wanted to steal it.



It is right here with us all the time.
And ultimately we give ourselves over to it.

We give ourselves over to it -
with the prayer that the divine take us -
just like the mundane things mentioned -
the mustard seed – the yeast in the bread -
the pearl – the net and the treasure –
for here we are.

The call of God is the call of the kingdom -
and we can be like those things.

And we do it with the prayer that God
will fashion us into what God needs in the world.
That I believe is the call of the kingdom.
We follow that and let it take us where we need to go.

Well - the nature of things is like the seed -
and the yeast – and the pearl – and the treasure and the net.
And you and I are part of it.
Amen.

¹ This story is adapted from Gangaji in *The Diamond in Your Pocket: Discovering Your True Radiance*. Chapter 1.

² John A. Sanford. *The Kingdom Within: The Inner Meaning of Jesus' Sayings*. p. 28

³ This discussion is also adapted from Gangaji in the same publication referenced above.

⁴ Adapted from Steve Garness Holmes in *The Feast Within*