

Parables of the Kingdom

Proper 12, Year A – Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, July 27, 2014

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

In this morning's portion from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells a bunch of stories, so instead of the kind of carefully considered explication of Jesus's parables to which you have become accustomed, I thought I would just tell a few *more* stories, some of which some of you have heard me tell before over the last couple of years.

More than a few years back, I knew this young woman (Jenny) who, though she was and is a *very* good cook, once had a very big problem with yeast. Jenny and I had just begun dating after a handful of years of my being too stupid to notice that she was interested in our having more of a relationship than just singing together in the church choir. Now, I was quite anxious to spend as much time with Jenny as possible, and having been a particularly pathetic sort of bachelor, I was more than a little eager to show off my girlfriend, so I invited my company commander, a *fellow* bachelor, to bring the woman *he* was seeing to my house for supper, and I asked Jenny to help host the evening.

Jenny had found a recipe for French bread that looked like a suitable accompaniment to the promised spaghetti, and having brought everything she needed to my place, she began to stir together the flour, the salt, the yeast, and whatever else went in this particular recipe in what most of you already know to be her usual efficient kitchen style. The recipe called for the division of the dough after the second rising in order to form two long loaves, but on the august occasion of the boyfriend's boss coming to dinner, Jenny decided that she would get a little fancy, and instead of those forming two loaves, she braided the two divisions into a single, beautiful loaf. Our guests arrived (late, as I recall) and with everything else *already* ready in one pot or another, Jenny slid the now somewhat enlarged loaf into the oven while we sipped some wine at the dining table.

When the bread should have been ready, Jenny went to check on it and we all heard her gasp. The yeast had continued its activity as the loaf baked, and by the time the bread should have been taken out of the oven, it was *coming* out of the oven on its own! The "monster loaf," as we still call it today, had risen and lengthened until it had pushed open the oven door. It was a very fun evening, and the bread was great – but it sure was huge.

A few years back, when I was still the Dean of St. Mark's Cathedral in Hastings, Nebraska, I was visiting a parishioner one afternoon, when I was struck by the *huge* evergreen that dominated the lovely landscaping of her backyard. In my memory, I think maybe it was a blue spruce, but in any case, the thing was almost perfectly shaped and it was a *giant*, spreading its branches a good thirty feet at the base and rising at least that far into the air. The day of this particular visit was one of those hot, hot days like yesterday, and Jackie my host had offered a glass of ice water that I had *gratefully* accepted. In the short time while she got the glass, I gazed out at the tree and saw at least a dozen birds, and no less than three squirrels, come and go from the branches.

When my host returned, I commented on the elegance and majesty of such a beautiful arboreal specimen – and she laughed. "That tree came with a *bush* that my husband and I planted years ago." "We brought the bush home in its container and just planted it where we thought we would enjoy it." "By the end of the season, this tree was growing up from nowhere, and by the next year, it was bigger than the bush that we *thought* we were planting in the first place." I leaned over a bit to look to see if there was a bush growing beneath those enormous branches. "Oh, no," she exclaimed, "the bush didn't survive the first year." "But hasn't that tree done nicely from a seed we didn't even know was there?"

On to story number three (and the *last*, for those who may be checking their watches). A few weeks ago, I told you a story about Camp McDowell in Alabama, but my first summer at Camp *Comeca* in Nebraska, I had a *similar* experience.

I had charge of the fourth-grade boys' cabin that year, the youngest group of campers at Comeca, so we were all of us newbies that year, and I had a delightful time discovering with them the many joys and pitfalls of camp life. I usually ended up spending my afternoons at camp either being the guide and chief

rower in a canoe with a couple of “my guys,” or being the “attacked” in various pool games – the object of all of them apparently being to drown the councilor. As is usually the case by the third or fourth afternoon of camp, a couple of my guys had decided to spend their pool time more quietly in the craft room. For their sake – and for the preservation of my own hide – I left the ruckus of the pool a bit early this particular day to check on them.

When I got there, I happened to look over in the corner to see four- or five-year-old Patrick, the too-young-for-camp son of the man who was helping with crafts. Patrick’s mother would have normally been the one helping out, I had been told, but she was ill, so Patrick and his father had been thrust into the Camp Comeca experience. Patrick sat quietly in the corner with a giant Tupperware container of plastic beads between his little legs. Evidently, the little boy had waited until all the “big kids” had had their chance to find what they needed, and then he had dragged the bin over to the corner where he sat carefully sorting through the beads with his pudgy little fingers. After appropriately, if not excessively, oohing and aahing over *my* boys’ creations, I went over and squatted down to talk to the littlest crafter. “What are you looking for?” I asked, running my own fingers through the bin, thinking it might be fun to help him find whatever it was. The little boy didn’t even look up from his sorting as he replied, “The right one.” Having been thus dismissed, I went on about my business, smiling to myself at his intensity of purpose.

I ran into Patrick’s mother at some diocesan function that fall. I had heard through the usual grapevine that she had recovered and I was glad to see that the news had been accurate. Around her neck I noticed that she was wearing what I guess you call a choker, made of a thin length of rawhide, adorned with a single, brilliant blue bead. Noticing my noticing, his mother said, “Patrick brought me this from Comeca when I was sick – and I haven’t taken it off since.”

Patrick’s family came to an event shortly before I left Hastings six years later, and I saw that his mother was still wearing that choker.

“The kingdom of heaven,” Jesus said, “is like yeast that a woman mixed in with flour until all of it was leavened.” “The kingdom of heaven,” he said, “is like the smallest of seeds that becomes a tree where the birds of the air make nests in its branches.” “The kingdom of heaven,” he said, “is like a merchant in search of one pearl of great price.”

Paul reminds us in this morning’s epistle reading that, “If God is for us, who is against us?” And yet we still fret, and we still worry, and we still treat ourselves and those around us care-less-ly. The kingdom of heaven, dear friends, is in *your* oven. The kingdom of heaven is in *your* back yard. The kingdom of heaven is dangling around *your* neck. The kingdom of heaven is in *your* neighbor’s eyes. The kingdom of heaven is in *your* heart. Do you see it – day by day? Do you see it – moment by moment? Or do you pass it by – and miss the chance to see the kingdom of heaven at work in *your* life.

Let anyone with ears, listen!