1 Kings 3: 5-12; Romans 8: 26-39;

**Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew** (13: 31-33, 44-52)

He put before them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.’

He told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.’

‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

‘Have you understood all this?’ They answered, ‘Yes.’ And he said to them, ‘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.’

**May I speak in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

If I had been here last week, I would doubtless have begun to share with you Matthew’s gospel thoughts on the Kingdom of God and what it is like. Just for clarity, I will say here that he uses the terms Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven interchangeably.

And what is the kingdom? It is the place where God’s rule and God’s desire holds sway. And we pray daily: thy kingdom come. Perhaps we need to consider what that actually means.

I knew a family, a long time ago in North Cornwall, in which the father, a highly-regarded education professional in the area, used to quite literally get out a ruler to measure the Viennetta (anyone remember those? Do they still exist even?) because if he didn’t make sure every member of the family – six of them – got exactly the same amount of ice cream, there would be ructions. … Imagine being so jealous that you watch every mouthful your siblings take to make sure they haven’t got even half a teaspoonful more than you have …

There's much in today's Bible readings about the generosity of God, the abundance with which God treats us, the way in which God loves to give to us. So if there is one thought to take away this morning, it is that God is generous. God is not a miser. God is not mean. God does not dole things out in little carefully calculated and measured portions – not even Viennetta.

In the reading from the first book of Kings we heard how Solomon is moved to ask for wisdom, discernment, understanding of how he's going to govern his country, rather than all the things he could have asked of God: wealth, military prowess, fame. And what happened? God gave him wisdom, discernment and understanding; and then added all the rest as well because that is what God is like.

As any parent does, God wants to give his best to us – and then more. That is how we show our love for our children – whether it be time or experiences or gifts, we give them all we can.

But there is more here than just generosity. Matthew, right at the beginning of his gospel, said: the kingdom of God is at hand. It is here. Those were the words preached by John the Baptist to herald the arrival of Jesus on the scene at the very beginning of his earthly ministry.

The context into which Jesus is speaking today is this: the people are not just sitting there at leisure, vaguely wondering about the Kingdom of God. They are sitting there fully aware of the toughness of life: there is illness, death, Roman occupation, they are struggling to make ends meet, worrying about troubles their families have… And into that, Jesus says: let me tell you about the kingdom of heaven.

And he goes on to paint a little picture of something quite small …. A mustard seed… And he plays with what it means to be small. This mustard seed is tiny – you could get hundreds in the palm of your hand. And we catch glimpses of the small things often: our encounters with the kingdom might seem insignificant sometimes, but then we consider what it might mean if each act of selflessness were to grow and multiply and be passed on. What a difference that would make. What a friend of mine called the significance of the insignificance.

And there is something too about the inevitability of the growth of that mustard seed. It is not dependent on human action; it is actually a more hopeful sign than that – the kingdom will happen – and is already happening - regardless of human intervention.

And then there’s the yeast; and the treasure; and the pearl trader; and the dragging of the nets for fish. And then Jesus finishes up with the scribe. Now normally, Jesus is berating the scribes and pharisees for their hypocrisy and so on, but not here: here he says that a good scribe will bring out both old and new from the treasury.

What the people have been taught before – the old - is not to be dispensed with. What Jesus is teaching – the new – does not supercede all that has gone before. There is no conflict in holding both old and new together – there is consistency. We will find the kingdom in that holding together of all that we learn of God’s ways.

And I like that: it chimes with where we are at the moment. We are on the cusp again now of so many things – this COVID thing is constantly evolving and the rules are changing almost faster than we can keep up. But we build on the old; we use the old as stepping stones as we learn to negotiate the new. We won’t drop the live-streaming now, just because we are heading back into church – we will keep doing it alongside. This time last year we wouldn’t have dreamed that we would be booking tickets to go to church – or wearing masks – or any of the other things that we are taking on board. Doesn’t mean the world is falling apart – just that we need to continue to learn to seek God where God is to be found. And adapt; and allow God to form us and change us. God’s time, not ours; God’s way, not ours.

As for the themes we can draw out of this gospel:

* the catholic nature of the kingdom is one – catholic with a small ‘c’ – the dragnet gathers up everything, indiscriminately – and there is room for every sort of bird in the mustard tree. A place for each one of us.
* the hidden-ness of the kingdom – it is already here; it is not a coming thing. But it takes the right eyes to see it and to discern its presence. We have to look for it; like the treasure in the field – or else see the proof of it by its action; the yeast has disappeared in the dough, but it hasn’t gone and its effect on the dough is clear.
* That there will be resistance to it; friction – the dragnet again, but also:
* The richness of knowing that kingdom – it is there to be found – like the pearl, hidden – is so worth discovering that the merchant sold everything he had to get it.

There is a church somewhere in the West Midlands that has a huge banner over the pulpit saying ‘you cannot out give God..’

No, we can’t. But we can be thankful for what God has given us. And express that thanks in ways that reflect our ability to do so - all things come from you, and **of your own** do we give you.

**Amen**