

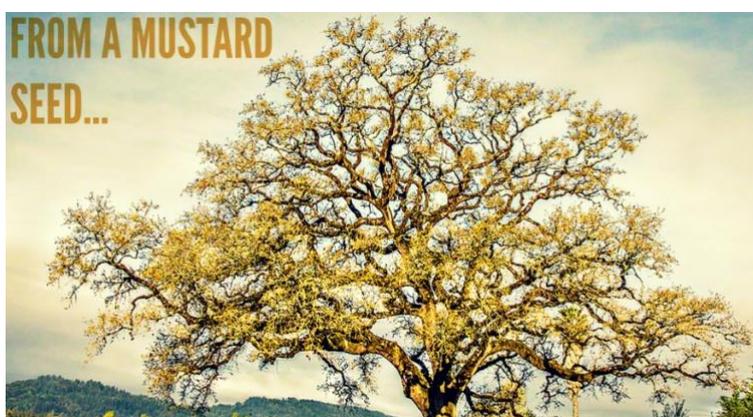
## ELCG Devotional Activity

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost•

Week of 26 July 2020

### “The Kingdom of God is Like...”

Jesus often used parables to teach about the Kingdom of God. In this week’s lesson from Matthew’s gospel, Jesus uses a series of very common, everyday images to teach about the nature of God’s love, which is both precious and extraordinary. **This week’s devotional is an invitation for us to create our own parables to express the presence of God’s love in our everyday lives.**



### Scripture

*[Jesus] 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.”*

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• We are now in “Ordinary Time,” the season of the liturgical year which follows Pentecost and is marked by the color green, which reminds us of growth. The term “ordinary” refers to measured (or “ordinal”) time. During this extended season, our focus turns to spiritual growth and discipleship.

*“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.” (Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52)*



### **Reflection**

The images in these parable vignettes depict very ordinary circumstances... a tenant farmer planting tiny seeds... a fisherman casting his net... a housewife measuring flour to make bread... a merchant selling his goods. Those who were hearing Jesus’ words firsthand could easily recognize themselves and their own lives in the stories. And then, as in keeping with the nature of a parable, Jesus offers a surprising conclusion to each of the stories. It is in that “twist” of a parable story where the lesson of God’s love resides.

In these particular parables, God’s love is compared to a tiny mustard seed, a hidden treasure, yeast, a pearl, and a fisherman’s net. All these items are seemingly ordinary, unassuming, and undervalued – very little is expected of them. Yet, as is the nature of God’s love, each one contains a worth and power that is unexpected and extravagant. From the tiniest of seeds grows a mighty tree that shades and protects. The granules of yeast cause the dough to grow and be transformed exponentially. The treasure which was hidden is found and is of great value. The one pearl is so precious that it is worth more than anything else one could have. The net that is cast wide, draws in all manner of fish, none beyond its reach.

*What do you hear about the nature of God’s love as illustrated in each these parables?  
What do they say about the presence of God’s love in everyday things and circumstances?*

### **Activity: Write your own parable: “The Kingdom of God is like...”**

Each of the parables’ items hold some value to the person using (or discovering) it, while also illustrating the nature of God’s love more broadly. Consider some things that are precious or of particular value to you and reflect upon how they may be illustrations of God’s love in your life.

**Write down something that holds special value to you.** It may be something material that holds sentimental value to you, or something that you use/rely upon regularly. Then, list out

the characteristic/s of that item that remind you of God's love or presence. Finally, write out a parable in a sentence or two that illustrate something about God's Kingdom with that item. Note the following example:

- **Something that is precious to me:** *My Dog*

- **Characteristics that remind me of God's Love:**

*Loyalty: stays by my side, enjoys being with me; encouraging when I've had a bad day; gives love that is unconditional.*

- **My parable: "The Kingdom of God is like..."**

*The Kingdom of God is like a dog that remembers me, even when I step away from her. She joyfully welcomes me when I return home. Her love is unconditional.*



### **Pulling it all together**

At the end of the week, consider:

- *In what news ways do I recognize God's presence in my day to day life?*
- *What other ways is God's loving presence revealed to us in the ordinariness of our lives?*

Share your parables with your family or a faith friend, sharing any new insights you've gained this week.

This exercise is intended to be joyful and creative, reminding us that God's Kingdom and divine love can be made known to us in surprising, unexpected and everyday ways.

*"The Kingdom of God is ... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."*

*(Romans 14:17)*

### **Prayer**

God of All Goodness,

Yours is the love that will never let me go. Like yeast that multiplies, your word opens my heart to reveal your kingdom, which is ever near. May the seeds of joy take root, that I may trust in you ever more completely and love more fully. Like a newfound treasure, may I delight in the extravagance of your love and share it fully with others. Like a pearl of great price, may I hold you tightly, learning to love in ways that reflect the love that is most precious of all, which is Christ Jesus. May my heart and mind be always open to imagining the fullness of your love for me and this world. Amen.