

**The Home owners store room. What will your response be? *Matthew 13: 51, 52***

Ahead of Jane coming back next week this is the final sermon in this short series looking at the parables of Jesus in *Matthew 13* and what it has taught us about the Kingdom of God and hopefully it has given us some fresh insights into the “Jesus we never knew” – the theme for this year.

From these parables spoken in public by the seashore of Galilee, on a boat pulled a little way off shore because of the size of the crowds, Jesus gave four stories that covered how the kingdom grows. He explained two of them. The parable of the sower and the weeds to his disciples in private. But to the crowd they remained as brain teasers. We looked at three of these. The parable of the weeds, the mustard seed and of yeast- or more accurately “leaven” – fermented yeast.

Then in a nearby house he continued to teach the disciples the “secrets of the kingdom” as to what the kingdom of God is like. We asked the question why he continued to use parables with the disciples where parables had marked a change of teaching methods in response to the growing criticism of the religious authorities of Jesus and that although Jesus was popular with the crowd they were not really serious or interested in what he was saying.

**This question of response and understanding runs through all the parables- both public and private - and is also our subject today in the last ‘quasi’ parable, that of the homeowner and the storeroom.** As the question Jesus asks of his disciples and us is **“Do you understand these things?”** I suggested last week that the reason for the continued use of parables with the disciples was on a different basis than the crowd. The three stories Jesus uses here to illustrate what the kingdom of God is like were the hidden treasure, and the pearl (which we looked at last week) and **the dragnet - which we will touch on briefly today.** Stories capture our imagination and they continue to do so whether it is films, plays, books or over a cup of tea or by the bus stop or social media on our phones. Jesus used stories to capture elements of what the Jesus story and the Kingdom of God was all about so that we both understand and enter into it. In being a faithful part of the ongoing story that continues to be told while one day moving to becoming fully told. Our understanding as to what that is is not just simply a process of deduction but God revealing it to us through his Holy Spirit as to our hearts and minds being opened to receive and respond to the secrets of the kingdom.

So, by way of summary and the story teller’s art I thought to use this [clip](#) from a film for TV that takes us through Matthew’s thirteenth chapter. Inevitably, as it is an American production, Jesus speaks with an American accent that to me sounds a bit like *Kevin Costner*. Nonetheless it captures some of the impetus and momentum of Jesus walking, talking, teaching and spending time with his disciples. See what you think. A helpful feature of this are the small numbers at the bottom right of the screen which change. This is not the running time but the verses the film covers in *Matthew 13*.

So with that refresher we are also going to take **a whistle stop tour of the seven parables to date to help frame the question “Do you understand these things?”** and what Jesus may have been driving at when **likening the kingdom to a homeowner that takes new and old things out of the storage room.**

**The first parable** is normally referred to as the sower but it is actually about the soils. It is the most significant of all. It is the farmer (not just a farmer) that brings the seed so that when the seed and soil come together the kingdom comes to life when the soil receives the seed and it begins to germinate. The sower is the same. The seed is the same. The different results depend on the soils and how they, and we, respond to the sower and the seed. What fruit we will produce will depend entirely on that. So, the four soils Jesus explains in *Matt 13:18-23* and are firstly those people who are like seed broadcast (distributed) from the sowers bag (more efficient seed drills don't happen till *Jethro Tull* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century who was born in Basildon but perfected his drill in Berkshire) to whom the seed just bounced off when it fell on the path and became bird food. Gone and forgotten. The second soil was on rocky soil where it germinates and grows for a time but the roots aren't deep and it is more of a flash in the pan. So, when hardships or difficulty come along they don't last the distance and give up. There's no depth of soil. It did not go deep enough to make a deep difference.

The next soil is deep enough but it faces competition from falling among thorn bushes. Things there already there which were not dealt with, or grow up to compete, stifle and eventually choke the life out of the kingdom seed so that it withers. Although still alive it doesn't bear fruit because, says Jesus, the worries about this life and the love of riches have choked the life out of it. The last soil is the good soil, those who hear the message and understand it and they bear fruit. It is the rate of return that sends the story into hyper drive and before the days of genetically modified grain, of a hundred-fold or lower variations or sixty and thirty. It is to this soil, which is actually starting to bear fruit that is the fruit of the kingdom, which is referred to by Jesus as he finishes this section on parables about what's in the store room of the homeowner that are about new and old things which can now be drawn on. Let's remind ourselves of what Jesus says to the disciples in the privacy of the house.

*“Do you understand these things?” Jesus asked them. “Yes” they answered. (Really?) “This means then that every teacher of the Law who becomes a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like a homeowner who takes new and old things out of his storage rooms.”*

Before we look at this in detail let's remind ourselves of what we have thought about so far in the light of four questions we have asked. With the parable of the weeds we asked, “why does evil persist?” As God's redeeming reign broke into human history in Jesus it works and is present but without apparent force. So although it is here society is not uprooted, we receive its blessings but it is in the present age of a mixed society. We can enter it, look for it, pray for it and can do things for the sake of the kingdom, we can tell about it, but only God can give it. It can work in us but it is never subject to us. It is for God to realise it, not up to us to seize it. Although barely distinguishable at present it will become as clearly distinguished as light from dark, night from day. It is an

encouragement to keep going, not to give up as evil persists. Yet it also speaks of God's reconciling love for sinners where in Jesus kingdom outsiders (which included you and me and those around us) can become insiders and what are now weeds can become wheat seeds by God's grace and forgiveness.

**The next question was “why is the kingdom so insignificant?”** In looking at the mustard seed, which the Romans regarded as a weed. This is not just a story of small things becoming bigger but the form and the nature of it. Not new empire building. Jesus was already surrounded by three forms of these, but kingdom building with the “conspiracy of the insignificant” bringing new life, new hope, new beginnings with a new community that incarnates the future in shared lives seeking righteousness, justice, peace, reconciliation in welcoming all races, ethnicities and classes, the nations of the earth.

**The parable of the leaven, or fermented yeast, helped us to ask the question “why is the kingdom so hidden?”** and the subversive nature of this story of Jesus making a hero out of yeast. Something that was thought to bring contamination, fear and segregation in religious life and Jesus saying this is how God works like this through the inclusion of outsiders and subverting ‘the way things are done around here.’ How the growth of the kingdom is hidden in the wrong sort of people, who themselves are often hidden, by the inner renewing work of the kingdom that brings ferment and change from the inside out. How it bubbles up, changes and transforms the unfermented parts of our lives.

**Then last week we looked at the twin parables of hidden treasure and the pearl and the question of “how do people find the kingdom?”** We considered whether it is the surprise of finding what was always there but remaining hidden for us to discover or from the results of long and patient searching. Rather it was not simply the discovery of finding it but the full embracing of that reality “surprised by joy.” That the value of it overwhelmed and cast into a different perspective everything else. The old way of life is swallowed up in the embrace of the new. That we discovered there was a need for our own personal response.

**The parable of the net would have easily resonated with the fishermen among them.** The by-catch, fish that can't be used, is still a big problem for fishermen. Whereas the weeds were about the world here the story is about the church, the people of God. Just as Jesus says not to rush to judgment, including violence, (which has been a feature of church history) in the way of our imposing judgment on the world here too it is also the case of the church. The church whether Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Independent has an unhappy history in the way it treats what it regards as heretics it is again a call not to rush to judgment. After all Jesus knew about the character of Judas from the outset. It is God who does the sorting when the kingdom is drawn to shore for sorting - not people now. Let us in the church remember it is not for us to determine the “real Christians” in a mixed church in which we inevitably live and work. That is God's business in the future, and to remember the words of Paul in *1 Cor 10:12 “whoever thinks he is standing firm had better be careful that he does not*

*fall.* “No one”, as *Monty Python*, the satirical comedians once remarked, was “expecting the Spanish inquisition”. That does not mean that there is not a vital place for compassionate challenge and encouragement to continue following the faith faithfully, nor the place for church discipline and the place too of being tender hearted and forgiving of one another as Christ has forgiven you. Yet it should give us at least pause for thought as for the place of violence in this. As Jesus is to say elsewhere that the time would soon be coming when his followers would be imprisoned and killed and those doing the imprisoning and killing were convinced they were doing God’s work for him. The assumption of that role by those claiming to follow Jesus has happened more than once since.

**So, we turn to this postscript on the parables and one of the surprising things to notice is Jesus actually saying something nice about the scribes who** have been amongst his biggest critics and were to use trick questions to try to trip him up. They were adversaries to the kingdom. Now Jesus is saying to his disciples they are scribes” *You are the scribes who have been trained for the kingdom of heaven.*” So, it might be a good idea to remind ourselves what their original job description was.

**They were experts.** Teachers of the Law of Moses. Ezra set the standard who was both a priest and a scribe in shaping a national religious renewal but by Jesus’s time the job has separated out. After the exile, the scribes had started the synagogue system and spent their time in undistracted study, preserving every jot and tittle of the oral law in written form. They were its defenders and they tried to apply it to everyday life. They gathered pupils who then had to transmit this without question and without change. They clashed with Jesus because they were legalistic, very traditional and who stuck slavishly to their script. The majority opposed Jesus, but some believed. In *Matt 8:19* a teacher of the law came to him and said, *“Teacher I am ready to go with you wherever you go.”* To which Jesus replied, *“Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lie down and rest.”*

Now Jesus is saying to his disciples (and us) you have been trained for the kingdom of heaven. All of us are taught in how God works in the world. To understand and learn how to cope and handle life, demonstrating life as to how God works. We are to put the truths of the kingdom into our lives and we have a responsibility to do so. The disciples already thought they knew it but it was as the story goes on that their shallow, limited understanding was revealed – particularly in how to apply it to their experiences. Yet if we claim we understand we become responsible for what we know. With this comes responsibility of what we do with it to understand what might be going on from God’s point of view. God’s plan (*Col 1:27*) *“is to make known his secret to his people ... which he has for all peoples. And the secret is Christ in you, which means you share the glory of God.”* It is Jesus who is the key that opens all the treasures of Gods wisdom and knowledge (*Col 3:1-3*) that gives us the power to live wisely and apply the truths we have learned.

**As a house owner, we are responsible.** We face the same problems and issues of others. The heartaches, the longings and loneliness, the same evils. Yet how do we

solve them? The house owner would have charge over their store house, the money, the possessions and all the things needed for running a household. These need to be deliberately stored and banked of accumulated knowledge and understanding. ***“If you love me,” Jesus says, “you will obey my teachings “(John 14:23)***. It is not enough, like the crowds, to hear and see things going on but to understand them in the light of the kingdom and start living in the wisdom of this. Knowledge is not enough. It has to be applied as James starkly puts it *“Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to the word, instead put it into practice. Whoever listens to the word but does not put it into practice is like someone who looks in the mirror and sees themselves as they are. They take a good look at themselves go away and forget at once what they were like.”* ( Jas 1:22)

To stop this happening Jesus says as a house owner we have **a storehouse that has both new and old treasures to draw on.**



Reconstruction of First century house

The house Jesus had in mind was reasonably well to do. Poor people had one large room and one smaller room for the animals. More typical was one built around an open court with smaller rooms opening onto the central courtyard. Families of several generations lived under one roof with little privacy. Normally the roof was where the tools were stored, and laundry put out to dry. It was the roof were people retired to pray. Furniture was very simple. The chief item was a chest for possessions, provisions and clothes. Those with a bit more money had a low table. Bedding was rolled out on the floor; beds were for the very rich. Most had a bath, a mikveh, which was a narrow affair where you stepped down into it. Toilets were an outhouse. The house Jesus had in mind was wealthy enough to have a dedicated room or cellar.

**The new realty of the kingdom does not displace or replace the Old Testament – it fulfils it.** There is a need to understand just how new the kingdom is so the old can be illuminated and unveiled for the beauty that is hidden there. *Augustine* wrote “God

wisely arranged the New Testament to be hidden in the Old and the Old to be made manifest in the New.”

So, when Jesus opened the scriptures to the couple on the road to Emmaus so they asked themselves “*Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road?*” (Luke 24:32) it was the Old Testament they were talking about. The old is received in new light and this is an encouragement to us that we should not neglect reading and studying the Old Testament. For it too can be a benefit to one another as we learn to be new scribes of the kingdom as well as the new in growing in faith, love, holiness, and service.

So, both in the Old and New Testaments it is knowing the abiding eternal principles and unchanging relationships and truths that can be relied upon that do not change. The promises of God that brings stability and hope.

**Yet all of us are always coming into new and changing experiences.** Falling in love, experiencing sickness, crises, parenthood, job issues, family issues. Where we need to draw upon Jesus for his power, wisdom and knowledge. It is not a boot sale but drawing on what we have banked to help straighten things out, to bring healing to our fears and where faith takes over. As perfect love casts out fears (1 John 4:18). **We come to the Bible and to Jesus to be changed not to amass information.** We cultivate disciplines of life and approach as disciples. One of those is simplicity, which is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle. The purity of heart that is to will one thing- “*to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33). Our happiness is not dependent upon getting what we want. We are not to hoard but to help. Where we set out on a consciously chosen course of action for the good of others that is often a hidden work and where a deep change occurs in us.

**The storehouse Jesus talks about is not for hoarding but for helping.** Not just for us but for others. They contain provisions and value that was intended for sharing when circumstances require it and need calls upon it.

In February 2013, the *Daily Mail* ran an article that 10 per cent of household's own appliances that are never touched but 65 per cent of us own devices but rarely use them from the 123 million gadgets estimated to be in our homes. This represents £8 billion worth of equipment. The top culprit is the toasted sandwich maker – it is never used.

**So, in closing how is your storehouse doing?** Are you banking it and reflecting on it for the circumstances that you, and others, face today? Just how well is your training going to be a competent scribe to help rather than hoard. **To use** rather than neglect to the challenges that face you this day?