Throw other priorities aside and seek God’s treasures each day.

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Pentecost + 9A – Mt 13 31-34 & 44-58

Today, we heard five more of Jesus’ parables of the Kingdom of God. Two weeks ago the parable of the sower told us the Kingdom of God contains various qualities of soils – *that’s us*. We bear varying harvests in response to the teachings of Jesus. Last week, the parable of the wheat and the weeds told us unplanned plants grow in the Kingdom. That surprise continues today with the parable of the mustard seed.

Some scholars say mustard was seen as a weed back then in the Middle East. It spread quickly, it was hard to contain and it could choke other crops. Yet Jesus says it’s a gift to the wild birds. What’s going on? Did Matthew’s community record this parable because the Gospel should spread like mustard? Or did some of them feel like the wild birds – strangers to the Jewish faith who found a safe home among the followers of Jesus? If so, this is about the unexpected grace that’s included *us* wild birds in the Kingdom that opened to us from something as tiny as a mustard seed?

The next parable of the woman who leavens her flour also starts with something tiny that grows surprisingly. *We* heard that she *mixed yeast* into the flour. But other translations use different words. They say she *hid leaven* in the flour. I looked this up and found that the word we translate with the English words – *mix* or *hide* – is actually a word we often hear in English today, but in very different contexts: it’s ἐνέκρυψεν – encrypt. *We* encrypt access to things we need to protect. Is Matthew’s community remembering that they had to

work furtively to fulfil Jesus' command to proclaim the Gospel? *So should we be sneaky and furtive about telling people Jesus loves them, or at least sensitive?* The woman didn't seem to think that way.

She encrypted the flour with a rising agent – actually *sour dough* – and evidently she had big plans. Three measures of flour is about 20 kg – enough to make bread for 150 people. [Luz Mt 8-20] Yet the leaven that would make such abundance possible was inconspicuous enough for Jesus to say its inclusion was *encrypted* – secret.

There are secret things in the next two parables too. But we're changing gear. This time, the little things are also very precious. People will give all they own to have them – hidden treasure; a longed-for pearl. If the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven were telling us that *from little things, big things grow*, are these treasures ways of describing their great value; the treasure we find when we learn of the love Jesus has for us? Are we content to stop with this answer? We tend to think that getting the answer right is finding the treasure – the important thing – as if that's the goal. As if now we've found faith we can relax and get back to normal life.

But it's not *mission accomplished*; it's really only a start. Faith is like that mustard seed: it scatters widely, germinates profusely and it spreads. But as Saint Charles Darwin would have us remember, it has to adapt to live in new conditions.

My story of encountering the unexpected. The first summer school in pastoral care. Faithful life is not about right dogma, but about relationship: care. Youth loves the black and white of finding right answers. But that has its limits. Christmas cake?

So I discovered something really important that wasn't clear

to me before. It was a new beginning; like a new birth. Some leaven got encrypted into me. And the real question ever since has been what I have to do with it today – and tomorrow. It's been mixed into my life; hidden; encrypted. And it grows and changes all the time.

But this is not just about me or any one of us. These parables were given to all of us to help us become yeast and seeds – to help us welcome, nourish and cherish. They were given to us so we might throw other priorities aside and seek God's treasures each day. These parables burst us from our personal bubbles. The mustard seed that grows into a bushy refuge, the flour that becomes bread, spiritual treasure that becomes the new focus of our life, the great, indiscriminate catch of fish that reminds us of the variable soil and the weeds – what do they mean when we understand them, when we've decrypted them;? And who are we when we have?

What's the hidden treasure; the pearl of great price? Us! Them! Jesus gave everything he was to have us? When we do understand his parables – when we've been discipled into what they mean – we're meant to see what Jesus is doing for people hearing these stories. These treasures are the new life springing up in us – sources of new life that we in our turn are to pass on to others in ever new ways – like Jesus did. We can use familiar images – small things – to help people consider faith; to sense the extraordinary value and the unexpected shape of the reign of God. God's way is full of surprises, bringing great things out of small beginnings; a *secret* treasure, but for *everyone*! We don't have to be comprehensive or even feel competent. The smallest thing can keep the rumour of God's love out there.

Surprising God, make us your indiscriminate welcomers; your secret, transforming leaven. Help us to treasure all your children; to call others to you, no matter who they are; and to accept the setbacks that come with being your followers. As we ponder your reign among us, please demand our attention and

inspire us to renew our service to you each day. And as you wake us and renew us again and again, thank you for our vocation, which is to offer your hospitality to all people. Amen.