

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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The text gives us 5 ways to imagine the Kingdom of Heaven (more specifically: God's will being done on earth as it is in Heaven):

- like a mustard seed;
- like yeast (leaven) in flour;
- like treasure hidden in a field;
- like a priceless pearl;
- like a net that catches all kinds of fish.

That is probably 4 images too many for one sermon.

A key to interpreting Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of Heaven is that there is almost always a reversal from our current social practices and customs:

- The last shall be first, and the first shall be last.
- Anyone who seeks to save their life must lose it.

are two good examples.

So how is a mustard seed like the Kingdom of Heaven?

Well for one thing it is small instead of mighty; and it is mostly considered a weed instead of a desirable crop. Being a weed means it grows in places where it is not welcome, nor cultivated. And being a weed means it is characteristically outside of human control; weeds do not require our assistance or participation in their coming into being and growth.

And for another thing the mustard shrub is hardly up to the prevailing plant image for the Kingdom of Heaven - the mighty cedar trees of Lebanon.

So how is leaven hidden in three measures (50 pounds) of flour by a woman like the Kingdom of Heaven?

Well, for one thing, **UN**leavened bread is what is associated with Passover and the messianic hope. Leaven is associated with corruption and impurity; with ordinary everyday life.

And for another thing (or two), the amount of flour is extravagant, perhaps wasteful, since it would be difficult for a peasant to bake and consume such a large amount of bread before it would go bad (because of the yeast in it). Also the Kingdom is being compared to women's work, to domestic activity.

So how is a treasure hidden in a field like the Kingdom of Heaven?

Well, for one thing, just as the yeast was hidden in the flour, so the treasure is hidden in the field. Those who found (by accident) treasure hidden in fields were field workers, i.e., peasants, and not the land owners. That a peasant would actually have enough possessions to sell to earn

enough to buy the field is a moot point. The "moral" of the story might be: the Kingdom of Heaven is so fabulous you would give everything you had for it.

So how is a pearl of great value like the Kingdom of Heaven?

Well for one thing, it means that even those who are accustomed to finding and trading fine things might still encounter a life-changing experience. Even those involved in the church all their lives might still be transformed.

So how is a net that catches all kinds of fish like the Kingdom of Heaven?

Well for one thing a net is something that works below the surface; hidden; out of sight.

And for another thing, it is not selective; it catches everything.

The separating of the fish into "good" and "bad" fish is stated in a flat-footed way not typical of Jesus. So one wonders how much this might have been a later elaboration.

For my take on this business of rewarding the good guys and killing the bad guys, see my earlier comments on [the parable of the field with both weeds and wheat](#).

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