

BREAKING **NEWS**

Rollstone Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

199 Main Street, Fitchburg, MA

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Church Organist and Musician: Gavin Klein

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

July 26, 2020

Prelude: **Jesus, my Lord, my God, my All**

Gathering Thoughts:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, it is impossible to believe that July is almost past and August will be starting in a couple days. There will be an update on how we are going to re-open the church to public worship. In the letter being mailed this week it will detail what we are able to do and the things that we must refrain from. The leadership are striving to be as responsible as we possibly can so that once re-opened we will not be faced into a precautionary closing of the church again. We pray and hope that all are well and look forward to seeing each of you real soon.

Let Us Rejoice as We Worship:

God gives us one day at a time:
Long enough for laughter to follow any tears;
Deep enough for prayer and silence to dance together;
Time enough to help someone in need;
Plenty of time to notice beauty and praise the Maker;
Sufficient time to build a bridge for forgiveness or tear down a wall
of resentment;
The right time to embrace friends, smile at strangers, play with children,
sing praise to God.
Praise God for this day we are given.

Opening Hymn: “For the Beauty of the Earth” Folliot S. Pierpoint

For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies.
For the love, which from our birth, over and around us lies;
Lord of all, to thee we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the beauty of each hour, of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun and moon, and stars of light;
Lord of all, to thee we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth and friends above, for all gentle thoughts and mild;
Lord of all, to thee we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise.

A Time of Prayer:

O God of heaven and earth, of time and eternity, of all life and love and light, we worship you.

For your perfect beauty and holy majesty, we praise you.

For your unfathomable goodness and gracious mercy, we thank you.

For your creative wisdom and unassailable justice, we lift up your name.

You are worthy of our adoration and deserving of our acclamation. We join with the saints of all times and places, with the angels and heavenly choirs, and with all creation in singing your glorious praise.

May you be honored and glorified by what we do in this place, in this hour.

In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

A Reading from the Scriptures:

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 (NIV)

31 He put before them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32it 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.’

33 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.’

44 ‘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.

45 ‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; 46on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

47 ‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; 48when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. 49So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

51 ‘Have you understood all this?’ They answered, ‘Yes.’ 52And 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.’

Musical Interlude:

Invocation

J. S. Bach

The Message:

“Breaking News”

When NBA legend Kobe Bryant, his 13-year-old daughter and seven others perished in a helicopter crash last January, chances are that most people heard about it when a “breaking news” ticker scrolled across the bottom of their laptops or TV screens.

Some programming might have been interrupted with a “breaking news” bulletin — the words “Breaking News” always in red.

When we see these words, we know that something amazing, terrible, interesting, incredible, troubling or heart-breaking has occurred. We also know that we’re about to learn more.

Breaking news. These two words are in themselves interesting. What is the grammatical role of the word “breaking”?

It is an adjective that modifies the word “news,” so the ticker across your screen could also read: “News that is breaking!”

Perhaps you could not care less.

But now, the question looms: Just what is the news breaking?

Think back to the events of the morning of September 11, 2001. Where were you at the time? What were you doing when the news broke about the airplanes that flew into the Twin Towers in lower Manhattan and the one that crashed into the Pentagon?

This news, like all “breaking news,” broke into our consciousness. It broke into history. It ripped through our communities, shredding conventional ideas, traditional assumptions and long-held beliefs. It was news that altered, modified, shattered and forever changed — something. The John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy assassinations in the 1960s. The moon landing in 1969. The Challenger explosion. Reality, life and human experience would never be the same. These events were indeed “breaking news,” or news that broke in upon our consciousness and awareness. Our lives as we knew them changed on those days; nothing was ever the same. Something indeed had been broken.

This is the meaning conveyed by our gospel reading for today, although certainly not in the negative sense of 9/11. Rather, the news that Jesus breaks is astonishing and incredibly good news. In fact, this is the way the announcement is framed in the gospels. Breaking news: Good news! The kingdom of God is upon us! The kingdom of God is within you! Or, as John the Baptist would thunder, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (3:2).

Jesus himself, after his baptism and temptation in the wilderness, began his ministry by announcing the same exciting, incredible and utterly novel news: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15, emphasis added).

It’s fair to say that most people — after hearing breaking news — want details. Many have an insatiable thirst for more details, more information,

more background or more understanding. If we're like this, we will stay tuned to our TV, or consult online sites regularly. We want to know more.

As this message was being prepared, we're getting breaking news about a variety of issues:

- Breaking news: Kobe Bryant's Helicopter Lacked Vital Warning System.
- CNN Breaking News: US COVID-19 cases rise past 53,200.
- BBC Breaking News @BBCBreaking: European Parliament votes to ratify Brexit withdrawal agreement by 621 votes to 49

This is what Jesus does in our text. He provides context. He tries to give the disciples understanding and insight. The kingdom of God has broken into history. It shatters everything! What does this incredible, amazing and daring action mean?

Jesus explains with parables and metaphors.

- Okay, he says, the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.
- Or, try this: It's like yeast.
- Or, here's another way of looking at it: It like treasure in a field.
- It's also like an expensive pearl.
- Finally, it's like a fishing net.

Now, let's look at each of these item by item, and then draw some conclusions.

The mustard seed. This seed is so small that, in the sowing of it, it's almost invisible. Yet from this virtually invisible seed, a huge shrub develops, large enough for birds (no doubt the little sparrows of which Jesus spoke on other occasions) to flit about, nest and rest.

This is an image of the kingdom of God. Its power is so great that no matter how small the work, no matter how small the seed that is sown (see the parable of the sower earlier in this chapter), it results in something great and amazing. Some commentators believe that the reference to the birds speaks to the nature of the kingdom as a hospitable place where all can find shelter and rest.

The kingdom of God, in other words, is not a thorny shrub where little birds are pierced, uncomfortable, judged and unwelcome.

The metaphor also reminds us that we cannot do everything. All we can do is plant seeds. Some "seeds" might be virtually invisible to the eyes of others — insignificant, meaningless, unimportant. But, although we may never see the shrub, these seeds grow and develop into a work that is important and meaningful.

Yeast. The meaning of this metaphor is similar to the previous one. That which is small, virtually invisible, yields an astounding product much larger than itself. In this case, the emphasis is not on external material growth, but

something that is happening inwardly. The leaven works within the dough.

Some medieval commentators of this text spiritualize the parable to see in the woman kneading the bread a picture of the church, and the “three measures of flour” are the human tripartite nature of body, soul and spirit. Such spiritualizing is interesting but unnecessary. It is more to the point to understand that Jesus is driving home another principle about the kingdom of God. It unerringly penetrates, permeates and pervades the neighborhood, culture and world into which it has been introduced.

Dough without yeast is heavy, thick, inert and tasteless. Dough into which leaven has been introduced is completely different. If you don't want to trust me on this you can attempt to make dough without yeast and it will probably end up in the waste can. The kingdom of God is a changing agent (growing); it causes expansion, development, movement, a metamorphosis.

So what is our image of the kingdom of God? Like a leavened loaf of bread, or an unleavened piece of flatbread?

The treasure in a field and an expensive pearl. It was not uncommon in the first century A.D. for someone who had something quite valuable to bury the precious item in his backyard or field. The object was thereby protected from marauders and thieves.

Remember the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30)? A wealthy man goes on a journey, but gives some money to three of his servants and asks them to invest it wisely so that there is a handsome ROI when he returns.

Time goes by. The master returns, and two of his servants are pleased to announce that they made a significant profit for their employer during his absence. The third servant, however, is able only to return safely the original cash. “But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money” (v. 19). He protected his master's money by burying it in the ground.

Jesus' parable in our text supposes that someone has found a treasure in a field accidentally. What is he going to do? He buys the field so he can legally claim the treasure in the field.

The purchase of a priceless pearl is a different matter. In this case, the pearl is not discovered accidentally. The pearl is discovered by someone who is shopping for precious gems, or something similar. He finds this incredible pearl, and knowing its value, sells off everything he owns to purchase it.

Breaking news! The kingdom of God is more precious than anything in this world. Give up everything to possess the kingdom!

This, in fact, is Jesus' message time and again. Here, you might refer to the story of the rich young ruler (see Mark 10:17-27), or recall that when the followers of Jesus joined him, they left everything behind, and those who could not do so were left behind. Remember Jesus' comments about self-denial and picking up one's cross.

Jesus also seems to imply a sort of “hidden” quality to the kingdom of God. The treasure is buried; the pearl is sequestered within the shell. Still, some people stumble upon the kingdom of God anyway, albeit accidentally. Some are searching for it and find it. But in any case, once discovered, you

divest yourself of anything that would deny complete possession of this incredible “pearl of great price.”

A fishing net. Most exciting of all perhaps (for a people living under the thumb of the Roman Empire), is the message that someday the kingdom of God will triumph over evil.

This last parable that provides further details about the “breaking news” of the kingdom of God is the announcement that the kingdom of God is not just a present, spiritual reality, but also an inevitable future physical reality. This eschatological dimension of the kingdom reminds us that the tares will someday be separated from the wheat (13:24-30); someday the “bad” fish will be separated from the good (v. 38). The evil will be separated from the righteous.

This is indeed good news for these people as it is for us today.

For many people today, the times in which we live are dangerous, confusing and crushing times. We are beset by so many ways of thinking. Evil and unrighteousness are all around us. We are often beleaguered and “hunkering in the bunker” of despair and uncertainty.

This message reminds us to step out into the light of the certain victory and triumph of righteousness. Breaking news! We can leave all of this in the hands of God and go back to being the church, being a mustard seed, being the yeast in the loaf.

Breaking news! Jesus Says That We Don't Have to Bury Our Treasure!

So what does all of this mean to us? Look at verses 51 and 52: Jesus asks, “Have you understood all this?”

They answered, “Yes.”

Then, Jesus says 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.”

Bring out the best china and silverware!

Put your treasure on display!

We do not, and should not, hide our light under a bushel basket (see 5:14-15).

We are agents of the new kingdom! We are heralds and messengers breaking the best possible news upon a world eager to hear some good news!

Musical Interlude:

O Esca Viatorum

P. J. Van Damme

A Time of Prayer – *let us remember all of our brothers and sisters on the prayer list, especially those who are having a difficult time during this period of social distancing. Please share your prayer concerns so that they may be added to the prayer list by emailing your concern to Pastor Dave at dbhanks92@comcast.net or by calling him direct at 978-821-9571. He is available every evening and on weekends. During this time we suggest that you create a prayer partner with whom you can pair up until we are able to worship together at the church.*

PRAYER LIST

Amy Belli
Carolyn Barney
Jack Brigham
Becky Colwell
Diana Escarbie
Cathy Fontaine
Chuck Funk
Bob and Pat Goguen
Linda Hurd
Mary Jackson
Tom Kazanjian
Sarah Kee
Bob and Doris Lane
Diane Lane Cormier
Linda Long
Lorraine Michaud
Audrey Painchaud
Cathie Perra
Maria Piazza
Chris Pollice
Melanie Pouliot
Jackie Reiss
Martha Quinn
Del Sampson
Elwin Shepard
Ron Smith
Carole Ann Sumner and Henry
Donna Thorne
Daniel Tousignant
Marilyn Wales
Mary Wayman

All who are experiencing difficult times and situations

All who are lonely or depressed

All who are personally dealing with the affects of the COVID-19 Virus

All medical personnel – doctors, nurses, testing staff, first responders

Our Church and all of its members and friends

All members of our armed forced who have committed themselves
to the protection of liberty

God of us all, we know we have been called to serve and in the quietness of these moments, we confess our shortcomings. In the face of worldly unrest and tragedy, mayhem and murder, illness and death, we acknowledge we sometimes feel powerless. We realize anew the difficulties we have in being faithful servants and we wonder if we are, indeed, able to drink the cup set before us. At such times, keep us mindful that it is not all up to us. Help us to remember that the source of our service is also the source of our strength and hope. Such is the paradox in which we live. We know that you are with us always -- even to the end of time. We pray in the sure knowledge that your love for us never lets us go even when we falter in our service. We pray with confidence as your children the prayer of the one whom we serve..... “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.”

Closing Hymn:

“Be Thou My Vision”

Mary Byrne

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Riches I heed not, nor man’s empty praise
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

Benediction:

May the power and blessing of Almighty God go with each of you as you leave now to minister to a weary world — remembering to make good and holy choices that will channel love, compassion and the presence of God to those around us. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you and those you love. Amen.

Postlude:

This is my Fathers World