

OUT TO SEED “ In Plain Sight” Rev. Susie Putzke

Romans 8:26–39 (The Message version of the Bible)

Matthew 13: 44-52 (Common English Bible)

‘The Kingdom isn't something we escape to someday; it's something we learn to notice today. God is already at work beneath the surface—in us, in our neighbors, and in all creation.

Have you taken a walk with small children? What should take ten minutes could easily take forty-five because they stop. Regularly. For everything under the sun. Every Rock... every feather (right Harper?) Every worm. Every dandelion, every little thing! It takes time because Children notice treasures that adults have trained themselves to overlook.

It's not that adults can't do it... we just don't have time or capacity to notice it... or we call it work. How a master gardener through years of experience is able to notice soil health. How electricians look at a wall and only see wiring. How a mechanic notices and hears subtle changes in an engine or the slightest change of sound in a machine.

Some of you might hear a chirp and say “Oh that is a Baltimore Oriole” where some of us just hear... Bird.

Our attention, our focus, and our experiences helps us to see things that are often hidden in plain sight. What our scripture texts today are inviting us to do is notice. To see hidden beauty and to appreciate the value of all we possess. Perhaps discipleship, like these parables, is an invitation to become child-like enough to pause and to examine all that is around us, above us and beneath us.

Maybe discipleship is becoming childlike enough to notice again and again. Jesus in these parables is not teaching us the way, the lesson or the answer but teaching us how to have eyes to see all that is before us. In one of our parables today there is a treasure in the field. It is not lying obvious and visible on top but it is buried. Most people probably walked right past it. It is in a pearl, in a fishing spot... in investment... in sacrifice and all around us.

Think about someone purchasing farmland. Nobody buys forty acres because they love dirt or land maintenance. They buy it because they know what that field can become. Harvest. Habitat. Food. A home. And just like a farmer investing in soil and seeds and crops... God seems delighted by our potential as well.

I try to think in those terms when I am frustrated by our lack of progress walking down our street with our two four year olds. How God must be so delighted that we stopped and noticed a lady bug, a yellow flower or a rotting banana peel. I have often joked about getting a bumper sticker for the car that says “this vehicle stops for cows, tractors and Turtles. It amuses me to think that God might take us in, in the same way a child takes in the world. That God might pull over to get a good look at us, to appreciate our beauty... to experience awe, excitement...curiosity. I don't think Jesus is trying to pull a fast one on us with these parables by proposing that the presence of God or the kingdom of heaven is hidden from us (locked up or buried) but instead perhaps Jesus invites us to have eyes to see that the treasures of heaven are in plain sight. **"The Kingdom isn't hidden because God is absent. It's hidden because we've forgotten how to notice."**

Have you ever discovered something valuable years after you already owned it? Maybe an old baseball card. Grandma's quilt. An antique hidden in the attic. You lived with it every day...without truly knowing or appreciating its value until one day it's there to solicit memories, to bring you comfort to gift to someone who might need it now.

Sometimes we search for treasures in terms of : “What it will do for me.” “How might it make me feel?” “What will I get from it? But what if the results are not weeks or months out. What if what we are yearning for isn't out of sight or out of reach. What if the treasure or the kingdom of heaven is built right here/ Not in the programming or the music, not in the sermon series or the quality of treats at coffee hour, but in the community. A community quietly learning how to love each other and show up for one another (not as we want but as they need)?

A beautiful example of this is our friend Jimmy. Jimmy has been on my mind a lot lately and has been a part of this congregation for some time. *I did get permission from his family to share about him with you in this space.* Jimmy can often be seen chatting people up in the hallway, sharing his favorite excerpts from scripture that he has memorized and feels strongly that we all should too... You might find him helping at coffee hour by doing dishes or wiping down tables. Jimmy owns a love first t- shirt in every color and proudly boasts of his love for this place and its people when he goes to the gym, when he gets his haircut, and when he is out and about in the community... If you don't know Jimmy by name you probably would recognize him by his big smile. Jimmy has not been too present these past several months as he has had many health struggles. He and his adult siblings have made the brave decision to discontinue dialysis and enroll Jimmy in Hospice care. He has had many visits from church members both at the hospital and VA. People praying with him, reading scripture to him and even sleeping in the recliner at his bedside so he feels less alone. Friends... This love, this attention, this pause from what is comfortable or perceived to just be, is the treasure of community. It is the kingdom of heaven in plain sight. The ways this congregation has always embraced Jimmy's, and the ways in which

he claimed all of us. When I was with Jimmy in the hospital last week I noticed his care board said that his discharge plan was heaven and his method of transportation was angels. I thought this was written by a nurse or family member who knew Jimmy well. I received word late Friday evening after writing this reflection that Jimmy found his way to heaven. I am confident that he is now reciting scripture to Jesus himself. Our pal Jimmy knew that....

"The Kindom isn't hidden because God is absent. It's hidden because we've forgotten how to notice."

The kindom of heaven doesn't often arrive with fanfare. It shows up in ordinary people who quietly teach us how to love. And once we've learned to recognize that kind of love, something begins to change. Our vision widens. We start noticing that love doesn't stop at the boundaries we've drawn. Not just neighbors. Not just strangers. Not just friends. The circle keeps expanding. And I will always think of Jimmy as an adult with childlike wisdom and curiosity for the kindom of heaven and in the many ways he brought out some of the very best in all of us just by being him.

Childlike Faith is ...not seeing less, but seeing more. Seeing that which connects us.. big and small things that the average adult all too often overlooks..

...pause...

This week, many of us had that reminder in a way we couldn't ignore. We've all noticed the air. Not because we wanted to, but because smoke has a way of reminding us that we breathe together. You can't limit smoke on one side of a border. The atmosphere doesn't recognize state lines or political parties. It simply reminds us that our lives have always been interconnected.

And perhaps that's why Paul, someone who rarely writes about creation speaks of it here in Romans 8 when he says that all creation is groaning. Which makes Romans 8 all the more striking. He says that creation groans. We groan. Even the Spirit groans. Paul doesn't imagine salvation as something happening *apart* from creation. He imagines all creation caught up in God's redeeming work.

We've often spoken about "creation care," as though the earth were simply something entrusted to us to manage. But Romans offer a richer image. Not stewardship alone...but Kinship. Solidarity. Shared longing. Creation isn't waiting for us to rescue it. Creation is waiting with us, longing with us, hoping with us for the fullness of God to manifest in all of us. In all the things...

Eugene Peterson translates Paul's words this way: "Creation waits on tiptoe." That which excites us. Anxiously trying to see something that appears to be just out of view or reach. But Jesus through these parables conveys that for which we search is right here. We are invited to recognize that kind of love, that connectedness... and when we do something.. something begins to change. and what is good for us is good for all. Our vision widens. We start noticing that love doesn't stop at the boundaries we've drawn. Not just neighbors. Not just strangers. Not just friends. The circle keeps expanding.

"The Kingdom isn't hidden because God is absent. It's hidden because we've forgotten how to notice."

So how do we let go of our need to be the ones in control. How do we let go of the hustle and the distractions and all the things that make us feel so separate from God at times.... I'm not sure I am brave enough to tell you. I'm not entirely sure that what will work for me will also be helpful to you. In the parable of the Pearl he sells everything. Theologians ask us what we are willing to give up for these eyes to see, these ears hear the ability to recognize the kingdom in our midst. What are we refusing to let go of that keeps us closed off or closed minded about all that God is doing in the world with each other?

Parents understand this when a toddler clings desperately to a broken toy. Meanwhile...you're holding something far better. But they can't receive it...because both hands are full.

Rock climbers know there are moments when you cannot reach the next hold until you release the previous one. They know that trust always involves letting go.

What are we gripping?

Being right?

Being comfortable?

Control?

Fear?

Scarcity?

Our political tribe?

Our schedules?

Our certainty?

And if we have open hearts and hands ourselves... what all might we be freed up to receive?

The delight and satisfaction of sharing in a meal...

Go rich wisdom gleaned from a service trip....

The quiet space and sentiments shared at the bedside of a friend nearing the end of life...

A walk in search of treasure.

These small everyday moments rarely make headlines. But they are exactly where the Kingdom of heaven can be found.... in plain sight. God has been present all along. In the field, in creation, in our neighbors, and in all the ordinary places we almost walked past. God may our eyes be open. Amen.