

Sermon /30 July 2023/ Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52/ Called to Action / Deacon David Martin / St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Albuquerque, New Mexico

The kingdom of heaven is an action. The kingdom of heaven is not a place nor is it a thing. The kingdom of heaven is an action.

Belgian theologian Edward Schillebeeckx wrote (and I paraphrase) that the kingdom of heaven describes a process, a course of events, whereby God begins to be seen as God – an action by which God manifests God's will among the people.

The kingdom of heaven describes a process, a course of events....an action...by which God's will is brought to the people.

Look at the multiple parables Jesus shared with us today.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed – that grows and provides nesting places for birds.

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast – that is mixed with flour and makes bread to rise.

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure or a pearl of such great value – that they inspire someone to sell everything they have in order to obtain them.

The kingdom of heaven is like a net - that catches fish – both good and bad.

The kingdom of heaven is a process, a course of events, an action.

The kingdom of heaven isn't the mustard seed itself, or the yeast, or the treasure, or the pearl, or the net. The kingdom of heaven is what those things do or cause to happen.

The kingdom of heaven is an action. And action requires something or someone to make it happen. Jesus tells today's parables to his friends so they can make that action happen.

Jesus shares the five parables and then comes my favorite part of today's Gospel reading. Jesus asks the crowds if they have understood what's he's told them. If I were there among those listening, I'd assume he was asking if I knew what the parables meant.

And those listening to him answer, "Yes." Are you sure about that? Do you maybe want to rethink that answer, followers of Jesus. It's OK if you don't get it the first time. There were several stories told one right after the other. Maybe you weren't up close and didn't hear every word Jesus said. Perhaps you need some time ponder it or want to ask some follow up questions.

Because I think it would have been clearer if Jesus had said, "The kingdom of God is an action. You are called to provide that action. Get to work."

But perhaps the beauty of a parable is that it means something different to each person who hears it. Unlike the past two weeks when we heard parables about planting and

harvesting seeds - which after telling Jesus purportedly spelled out verbatim what each word meant - this week's parables offer us no explanation. Jesus simply tells the parables and then asked if the people understood what he was saying.

And maybe they all said "yes" because each one heard Jesus tell them something meaningful - although it might not have been the same thing the person next to them heard.

I decided the premise of today's sermon was Edward Schillebeeckx's suggestion that the kingdom of heaven describes a process, a course of events....an action...by which God's will is brought to the people.

And now I'll stop. That's the springboard. The rest is up to you. You've heard the parables. I've added the idea that the kingdom of heaven is not a place, but rather an action. Now it's up to each of you individually to figure out what that action is - or what that action means - to you and how you're going to make it happen.

What are you going to do to make the kingdom of heaven a reality today?

To help us move from thought to action, I invite everyone here today to write their own parable. The format is easy. You start by writing, "The kingdom of heaven is like...." Then you pick something that will inspire you to an action that can help bring God's will to God's people.

There is paper in each pew if you care to write something down or you can use your order or worship. You can share your parables in the collection plate at the offering or tell them to me after church today. You can think on your parable and email or text it to me later in the week. Or you can just keep it to yourself to pray about.

Here are some parables I came up with.

The kingdom of heaven is like The Great British Baking Show on Netflix and you binge-watch four seasons which inspires you to create the perfect dessert for your family and friends.

The kingdom of heaven is like a New Mexico United soccer game which you attend and after seeing the excitement of the children in the crowd, you volunteer to coach a youth soccer team.

The kingdom of heaven is like a plastic grocery bag which hits you in the face on a windy day and it draws you to organize a team to pick up trash in your neighborhood.

The kingdom of heaven is like a politician you see on the news who makes your blood boil and you decide to volunteer for the campaign of their opponent in the next election.

The kingdom of heaven is like a person you see on the street without a coat on a cold day and you are drawn to go to a thrift store and buy many gently used coats which you put in the trunk of your car to hand out when see someone like that again.

The kingdom of heaven is like the voice of a small child you hear in church and you reach out to them and ask them to tell you what they learned in Children's Chapel that morning.

The kingdom of heaven is like a book you don't care for but allow it to stay on a library shelf and you tell others about books you prefer

.... or a song you think is racist but simply choose not to listen to it instead of drawing attention to it and you suggest music you like to listen to

.... or a silly movie you feel is inappropriate but instead of grouching about it and you invite friends to watch a movie you enjoy.

The kingdom of God is like something you disapprove of but it lights a fire for you to work towards a good alternative instead of complaining and offering nothing better.

I invite you to try writing a parable of your own. The kingdom of God is like something that inspires me...you....us... to an action that will make the world better.

The kingdom of heaven is not a place. The kingdom of heaven is not a thing. The kingdom of heaven is an action.

We are called to bring the kingdom of heaven here to earth. We are called to action.

Let's get moving.