

Today we find ourselves in the middle of the 13th Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. If you like parables, this is the place to be. Last week we heard the Parable of the Sower.

Two of our three parables today logically follow last week's parable in that they are connected to the Earth, to seed, to fruit and to harvest. The third speaks of baking and yeast. But what they all have in common is that they describe the Kingdom of Heaven, which is Matthew's way of saying the Kingdom of God. And so these parables do not give a picture of Heaven so much as they are valuable guides and explanations of truths of this life and motivation and help to get to the next.

I have to admit, I know almost nothing about farming, but compared to what I know about baking..... I'm an agricultural genius! So, I'm going to limit my comments to just the first two.

I find the first parable intriguing in that it speaks to something we can all relate to... the co-existence of good and evil. Anyone and everyone experiences this.

Good and evil are intertwined, like the strands of a rope, in *everything created*. In nature, sometimes the devastating forces of fire, wind and water leave behind them destruction. But in their wake, renewal happens. The same is true of humanity. Our politics, our history, our culture, our own hearts are in a constant struggle with both the evil and the good.

Why is that? Why is it that bad things happen to good people? Why do good things happen to people who are, themselves, not so good?

It is important to know that God does not bring evil on anyone, not even His enemies.... He cannot do... Nor can He be... in any way..... evil. BUT.... but.... even though He cannot do evil, He does permit it to exist.

For without the temptations we face, without the wrong we sometimes desire, the act of our being or our doing the good loses its meaning.

It is the presence of evil and adversity that allows us to become what God calls each one of us to be. Virtue is empty if it cannot claim a victory. Courage of heart and purity of soul is meaningless, if it never has to face fear or the filth of sin and immorality.

There are no heroes if none of us ever has to be heroic.

There can be no Saints without sinners, no martyrs without tyrants.

If life were simple, and fair and always perfect, what would our purpose be?

Having said all of that, I need to say this: There is no good in evil. It is wrong and perverse to think that by intentionally doing evil one can bring about some great virtue. God does not revel in the horrors of war, the difficulty of disease, the devastation of death and loss. But He will use what He may to affect His creation and sanctify it.

He also might not. A hard truth is that not every cloud has a silver lining.

But either way, one cannot extract the weeds without effecting Gods plans for the wheat. We cannot cut away every evil and not disturb the good God may do.

We are not called to cooperate with the bad, but to change it, by sowing good seed.

Which brings us to parable of the mustard seed.

Even among the weeds we are called to create the Kingdom of Heaven here on Earth.

Mustard seed faith is the way Jesus challenges us to do so. It is the faith and perseverance in the small, little things that affect monumental changes and accomplishments.

Think about this:

Great works of literature start with the learning of the alphabet by both the author and the reader.

Every great symphony is written on the same music scale.

Likewise... peace in the world must begin with peace in our homes.

The justice of God will transform the great issues of our day, but only when justice and reconciliation and mercy take deep root in our own decision making... in our own standards of morality and ethics.. in our own approach to what is right and wrong.

Mustard seed faith is not always easy - mainly because we expect and want immediate solutions. We have little patience for the small and simple.

But Jesus asks us today to approach life in the faith that small and simple is the way to bring about His Kingdom.

It is in the smallest acts of goodness.... from the most hidden offer of mercy and forgiveness.... from the most personal conviction of right.. in the face of doubt and ridicule..... that a mighty tree will take root and an abundant harvest will be realized.

The good news is that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand... but... it still remains to be built up by our hands. That is the challenge we are faced with. What will be our response?