

The seed goes on growing...

With today's gospel we've come to the end of a set of gospels in which Jesus has offered his listeners a series of parables that have had as their subject a description of what is called "the kingdom of heaven." We've heard the parable of the sower and its associated explanation. We've listened to the parable of the dandelion and the wheat, the mustard seed and the yeast in the dough. Today we've had the parable of the treasure in the field, the pearl of great price and the dragnet cast into the sea. Jesus has used these parables to offer an image of how the "kingdom of heaven" is to be visualised and so understood. He asks the disciples whether they have indeed understood and in their affirmation he offers the rather enigmatic little phrase: *well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom things both old and new*. Can those words provide us with further insight into what these parables are really telling us?

If we go back to the Sermon on the Mount we recall how Jesus having called the disciples around him, begins to teach them... *how happy are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven...* The Beatitudes set out the components of the human spirit which define the essential qualities of the kingdom: compassion, mercy, justice, peace, gentleness, poverty, meekness, purity of heart. These are the building blocks of the new foundations that Jesus calls to be set down as each of us strives to bring forth God's kingdom. He tells us again and again how *you have heard it said* (the old) only to challenge us with his words *but I say this to you* (the new) and in doing so he brings out the radical nature of how the kingdom will not simply replace the Law and the Prophets of the Covenant but will actually complete and fulfil it by deeds and words as inaugurated through him. The examples of the parables with their descriptive power provide us with the very context by which our everyday lives will blossom into the flourishing and fruit bearing kingdom he calls for, as the old becomes renewed and reformed in the new. Jesus tells us it's here, all around us, it's like yeast in the dough, seed in the ground, and treasure in a field waiting for us to discern its presence and discover its power. And what is this power? Well next week's gospel will reveal to us both what it is and just how effective its action is, but we'd better leave that till next week!

The parables which Jesus told his disciples contain their own narrative. It's a narrative which sets forth his mission. The story is to unfold in its own time dependent on our reaction to them and our understanding of them. They have a purpose which asks us to ponder them in the light of our own individual situations. They resonate that purpose in a simple, uncomplicated way, placing before us questions that go to the heart of our calling. The seed of the kingdom has been cast and its presence is amongst us and within us. It may be that we don't recognise it because it's choked by other extraneous growth. It may be that we haven't discovered or discerned it because it still remains buried just waiting to be unearthed. But when we do unearth it we realise that it is priceless because it can bring out in us all that we are and transform us into something that perhaps we never thought we were capable of becoming and that possibility is surely worth everything we have.