

26 July 2026, 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 13.44–58, 1 Kings 3.5–12

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✠ May the word of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight O god, my strength and my redeemer.

Did you notice that this week's gospel reading is the same as last weeks? The weeds and the wheat, good and evil. Let both of them grow together until the harvest. Then at harvest "the Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Mat. 13. 41-42)

And what do we read this week? "When [the fishnet] was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good fish into baskets but threw out the bad." And then "The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Mat 13. 49-50)

A blazing furnace with weeping and gnashing of teeth certainly *sounds* like a reference to hell! But it isn't.

The blazing furnace is simply a description of the local rubbish tip. Weeds and bad fish are thrown in the bin; people are not. The warning is not about eternal torture – it's about missing the kingdom when it's right in front of you. Those who refuse to take the kingdom seriously become outsiders to its joy.

Today, though, Matthew gives us something extra. He says: "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" (Matt 13.52)

This is remarkable. It directly addresses the scribes and Pharisees – the religious professionals – and it's *positive* instead of negative. Those who become disciples of the kingdom don't have to abandon their years of learning. They can bring out treasures old and new. Tradition and fresh insight together.

This suggests that the 'bad fish' that are thrown away are those religious leaders, who refuse to recognise the kingdom of heaven when it is right in front of them. 'Weeping and gnashing of teeth', describes the intense frustration of people who cannot except that God is doing something new. Because to recognise the kingdom of heaven, we need humility.

So what does Jesus do to show us the kingdom of heaven? He throws parables all over the place. In fact, Matthews gospel has eleven parables about the kingdom of heaven. So strap in:

- "The kingdom of heaven is like someone who sowed good seed in his field."
- "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field;"
- "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."
- "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.
- "the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls;"
- "the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind;"
- "the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."
- "the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves."
- "the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard."
- "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son."
- "the kingdom of heaven is like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom."

All that is in addition to mentioning the kingdom of heaven another twelve times – twenty-three in total.

Sometimes Jesus says the kingdom is near and we must repent. — literally *change our hearts and minds*. Twice he speaks of it in the beatitudes. And he reminds us again and again that we must become like little children to enter it. Are your brains full yet?

The point is: we need many parables. They keep us from getting stuck on one image. As soon as we latch onto one picture of the kingdom, Jesus gives us another that shifts the angle. Taken together, they give us a sense of the kingdom without letting us pin it down. Because the moment we think we have a clear, definitive picture of the kingdom, we are certainly wrong.

And we will get it wrong — because the theme of these last three weeks is that human beings are terrible at discerning good from evil. And we don't get to decide who gets into the kingdom and who doesn't.

Solomon, in our Old Testament reading, does well precisely because he shows humility. He prays: "my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, *although I am only a little child*; I do not know how to go out or come in. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind... *able to discern between good and evil*." (1 kings 8-9)

And Jesus says: "Whoever becomes humble like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18.4). And: "Let the little children come to me, for it is to such as these, that the kingdom of heaven belongs." (Matt 19.14)

Solomon discovers how to "go out and come in" to the kingdom, by recognising his own limitations. The path to wisdom is the path of humility. To truly know yourself is to realise how much you still do not know.

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (Matt 3.2)

Or in other words: "unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 18.3)