

**“A Glimpse of Heaven (1)”**  
**Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46**  
**July 24, 2011**  
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When you think about the “Kingdom of God,” what immediately comes up your mind? Being human, we have a natural curiosity about our afterlife in the place known as heaven if we still believe in heaven. Honestly, no living person fully knows what heaven looks like. In our Scripture reading today, Jesus explains the Kingdom of God to his disciples using a parable. Can you explain what the Kingdom of God looks like?

Have you ever been to Disneyland in Anaheim? What a fantastic place to have in the world! Two years ago, my wife and I went to Disneyland for the first time. I’m not a big fan of resorts, so I wasn’t much interested in going, but my wife wanted to go so we went. I was taught two important phrases which can make married life much easier and enjoyable. They are: “Yes, ma’am” and “I am sorry! It is my fault!” Many members at Centennial church, especially the preschool advisory committee, encouraged us to vacation at Disneyland. They described it as “heaven on earth.” Their comments opened our hearts and encouraged us to make the trip! If you remember, there are two separate parks: Disneyland Park and California Adventure (with rides like Soaring over California, Twilight Zone (with a plunge down), Space Mountain and so on). It was so much fun that I even forgot about my pastoral duties for a while and journeyed back to my childhood, a time when I was very curious about the world.

However, the Kingdom of God in the Scripture reading today is not like Disneyland. It is not a physical building or place where we can enter, but more like a process or a focus on something which is happening “here and now” among us and through us. The scripture doesn’t talk much about a geographical location such as above or below, but rather a context where we can actively participate in and we can also play a role for transformation of something through our efforts that we make.

It might be helpful to see a biblical background behind our text. In Jesus’ time or even after Jesus Christ’s ascension, the Christian community was still quite small, not noticeable even to the Jewish community. However, rumors about Christians prevailed such as consuming babies during communion. Jewish Christians were isolated and segregated by the Jewish culture and community because of their beliefs. Non-Jewish Christians still had to find a hiding place avoiding from persecution and hardship from Roman emperor and Jerusalem.

In our Scripture text, Jesus shares three parables about the Kingdom of heaven. Imagine a Mustard seed; the Bible reminds us that this seed is the smallest of all seeds. The situation where the disciples were placed was similar to a mustard seed. They were ignored, abandoned and their faith was disregarded as nothing to the Jewish community. Jesus encouraged his disciples by saying that “you are not the smallest, but you are special. Look at the smallest seed. Don’t look at your present, but see the future that God will do in you. When a mustard seed has grown, it is the greatest shrub and becomes a tree. In the near future, many birds of the air will come and make nests in its branches.” This is a word of hope, empowering us and giving us a visionary thought for our community.

Do you remember when you had a personal encounter with God in your life? John Wesley describes one in his diary: “In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change that God works in the heart through faith in

Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.” Like John Wesley, you personally have heard God’s calling in your life and have responded to God with an open heart. It was a personal moment between just you and God. You became a child of God. That’s why all of us are here together today. Isn’t it a miracle? We are small when we are separate, but look around us. We are not small now. We have become a shrub and a tree. We are building the community of Fair Oaks United Methodist Church. People will come and find a shelter for peace and gain strength for their life as many of birds of the air come and make nests.

Traditionally, yeast has been a negative image in the Jewish culture. Jewish people were told to eat ‘only unleavened bread’ during Passover festivals on the desert. What Jesus taught here is a very provocative and somewhat dangerous idea for the Jewish people. He taught his disciples to be the “yeast” which will transform three measures of flour to leavened bread. Yeast plays a role bringing a dramatic change not only its shape, but also its taste. It is a symbol of transformation. Like yeast, we have to bring the love of God into this world and transform this world into God’s realm where the love of God prevails. Jesus calls his disciples and each of us to be a transformer to this work in the world like yeast. Jesus never introduced the realm of heaven as a vacation resort, but calls us to be active and passionate people who are constantly working and transforming our world into God’s kingdom among us.

I have had the opportunity to meet with almost all the committees at our church; I have just a few more to meet. I have been very impressed by the active and passionate service this church. I want to thank you all for your dedication and hard work. We are not spectators for the kingdom of God. God invites us to be God’s co-workers to build the Kingdom of God through us. It is not a Utopia, but we can and must start building it “here and now” in our time.

Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a treasure hidden in a field. The Scripture says, “Someone found a treasure in a field; then in his joy, he sells all he has and buys that field.” Jesus taught the disciples how joyful we become when we dream the dream of the Kingdom of God. What can we compare with the joy of heaven for us? Every time I see my baby’s smile, it brightens my day and empowers me. Maybe joy of finding “the Kingdom of God” can be compared to a big smile of a baby. It is priceless and invaluable to us. God will be pleased to see our joy in the work of Kingdom of God. It is also a privilege to work for the Kingdom of God, and it is worthwhile when we pay with our time, energy and passion. To build the Kingdom of God is a great invitation sent from our God. As a child of God, we would like to do what God wants us to do.

According to Steve Garnaas-Holmes, “Jesus has no far-off land in mind. Can you see? The realm of heaven is not removed but always inside something, hidden close at hand, underground, under water, under your nose. It is nearer than your think. Heaven is not up, my friends, but in.” As Jesus reminds his disciples in his prayer, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.” God is working with us and through us so that the Kingdom of God is happening “here and now” among us and in us.

I believe that Fair Oaks is a faith community actively building up the kingdom of God. We are not talking only about Trustees building projects but all of our actions in faith: our reconciling ministry, outreach ministry possibilities and even making disciples of Christ through young people’s ministry and continuing faith development for the whole congregation to grow and serve others. Fair Oaks congregation must be a small version of the Kingdom of God. We must continue to grow and become a shrub and a big tree for others. That’s why we come together every Sunday to build and construct “the kingdom of God” through our worship and service. I hope and pray that we continue to keep this up in our faith

together.