

In The Kingdom of Serendip

Matthew 13:44

The kingdom of heaven is like . . .

Human beings are not the only species on this planet with language, but some anthropologists suggest one of the things that sets us apart from other animals is our ability to use language creatively . . . to imagine . . . to dream . . . to visualize using words. So, we tell stories and we make art . . . to explain and describe the world around us . . . the pictures we create help us connect and understand concepts that might otherwise be difficult.

One way we do this is by using poetry and simile and metaphor. So, if I say, “You can rise above adversity and soar like an eagle”, you know I don’t mean that you can literally fly, but the picture evokes the feeling of being free and majestic. Or, if I tell you “Her singing sounded like nails on a blackboard”, if you’re my generation and older you will immediately shudder because you’re already hearing that sound in your head!

Metaphor paints a picture for us. So, when Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone found” you immediately nod in understanding . . . don’t you?

Treasure! Hidden in a field! And someone stumbles upon it! That’s what the kingdom of God is like? It *is* a bit odd, isn’t it? It seems all too easy . . . too random. Maybe too good to be true . . . like getting an email from a Nigerian gentlemen telling you you’ve won a million dollars in a lottery you didn’t enter! We know that’s not how life works . . . we’ve all got our scam filters on these days . . . if it seems too good to be true it probably is. And, yet, this is what Jesus says God’s kingdom is like! It’s like treasure hidden in a field which one day you just stumble upon . . . you can’t plan for it . . . you can’t work it into your diary . . . you can’t even decide about it . . . it isn’t arranged, or scheduled, or managed . . . at least not according to *our* plans! It just happened to the man . . . totally unforeseen . . . he didn’t do anything for it. He didn’t work for it. He didn’t earn it; he just happened upon it!

This is what God’s kingdom is like. It seems like it needs a grander metaphor? And, if there’s no rhyme or reason . . . if you just stumble across it . . . isn’t that all a bit too easy? It doesn’t take any thought . . . or effort . . . or commitment! If that’s what’s God’s kingdom is like, won’t that just create lazy Christians . . . isn’t that cheap grace?

Cheap? Well, when you think about it, it was hardly cheap . . . the man in the parable gave up everything for it! He sold *everything* to buy that field! Everything he had! In his joy . . . he willingly gave up everything. Not because he had to, but because he wanted to . . . he was a changed man . . . you might say in finding the treasure he found himself . . . and it didn’t come cheap, it was free! It set him free . . . free to sell everything else . . . free to forget about everything else . . . free to enjoy this unexpected, undeserved, surprising, joyous gift.

The kingdom of God is like that.

But, hang on . . . why him? I mean, good for him, but what about everyone else? If the kingdom of God is like that, isn't that kind of arbitrary . . . fickle? Well, maybe. But, what's the alternative? How else can you talk about pure gift? How else can you talk about grace? If it weren't like that where would be the surprise? If it weren't like that . . . if you could somehow plan it . . . or, order it . . . or, work for it . . . where would the joy be? Would you be willing to give up everything? Wouldn't you want to hold a little bit back . . . just in case . . . or, maybe put it on a payment plan . . . with insurance and warranty just in case it didn't work out? Sounds sensible . . . but, where's the joy in that?

In any case, Jesus didn't say the kingdom of God is like business contract . . . no, it's like treasure hidden in a field that someone stumbles upon. It's a totally unexpected, undeserved, unplanned surprise.

A surprise that, when found, the man immediately hid again! What's going on there? Well, this is the nature of God's kingdom . . . of God's gracious presence . . . it always remains hidden . . . even when it is found . . . or when it finds you! There's really nothing to show for it . . . nothing impressive we can parade around for others to see . . . "Look at what I found!"

And, thank goodness for that! Imagine if the advertising people got hold of the treasure . . . the managers . . . the marketers! They'd produce glossy brochures and programs and guide books. They'd set up shops to sell replicas of it. The experts would debate the best way to find it . . . each of them claiming they had the right way! They'd probably set up whole organizations to manage it.

They'd want to display it in stained glass and impressive buildings and we might start to believe it was these that were the actual treasure . . . and fight tooth and nail not to give them up! They'd argue about its nature and fight over who really found it. They'd market it and monetize it and control it and domesticate it and suck the life out of it and force the joy from it . . . and, I'd get the job of giving you a little talk each week about the seven steps to finding your own treasure and I'd send you out with a map . . . as if you just tried a bit harder, or were a little more committed to the search, you would find it . . . as if the treasure could be found by our plans, and our cleverness, and our commitment, and our understanding, and our skill!

But, it can't . . . because the kingdom of God remains hidden . . . even when it is found. Who will stumble upon it? I don't know. I can't give you a plan, or a treasure map. All I can do is proclaim to you: "Your sins are forgiven!" How about that?! That means you're right with God! That means nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus! That means you belong to God . . . just as you are . . . whoever you are! "Your sins are forgiven". Now, that's a bit dodgy, isn't it? Who am I to proclaim that to you? Me . . . a sinner just like you! Me . . . I have no particularly magic words to speak . . . nor any amazing Godly wisdom to impart . . . all I have is a call . . . your call . . . God's call . . . to tell you: "Your sins are forgiven".

All I can do is welcome your children and grandchildren . . . your friends . . . your neighbours to the font . . . pour some water over their heads, speak God's name over them and marvel in faith as God claims them for himself.

All I can do is invite you to come . . . to come to this altar . . . to hold out your hand . . . to receive a sip of wine and a scrap of wafer . . . and say: "This is Christ's body . . . this is Christ's blood . . . given and shed for you . . . Jesus is here for you . . . present with you". It's a gift . . . God's gift to you! How about that?!

I don't know how that all works, but what a joy it is to do it. What a joy it is to do.

Yes, the kingdom of God is like treasure hidden in a field.

Amen.

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