Daily Discipleship

Sunday, July 24-30 (A) – Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Tips of Discipleship: *Choose Wisely*
Focus Question: *What is one choice you made this week because you were a Christian?*

word *of life*

"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." Matthew 13:44 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Preachers as they prepare sermons look at Bible texts through the eyes of *law and gospel.* Some preachers emphasize the law and judgment of God to the point it sounds like the preacher is trying to scare a person out of the grips of hell and into eternal life. Other preachers are at other side of the spectrum, preaching all comforting, good news and not mentioning human sin and God's judgment.

1. *When (if ever) have you heard the phrase "law and gospel"?*
2. *What does that phrase "law and gospel" mean to you?*

The four parables found in this week's lessons combine teachings of law and gospel. These parables are using metaphors to describe the kingdom of heaven. The first parable describes the kingdom of heaven as a mustard seed sown by someone in a field. It is clear this metaphor is extreme. What person would take the time to sow a single, small mustard seed in a field? Planting only one seed is not wise. Yet, if successful, this small seed produces a great shrub, strong and mighty enough for birds, their nests, and the eggs.

The emphasis is not on the work of the laborer, but on God's activity – even when it appears small or insignificant. These are comforting and encouraging words. May God take the mustard seeds planted by our congregations, bless them, and use them for the kingdom.

3. *What does the parable of the mustard seed mean to you?*
4. *Is this a clear or confusing parable to you? Explain.*

Jesus further describes the kingdom of heaven like a treasure and as a pearl of great value for which people will sacrifice much. Ultimately, it is not about the treasure, the pearl, or those who search. This parable is about the joy of the kingdom of heaven. These are parables intended to motivate people to seek the kingdom of heaven and discover joy.

5. *How are these parables of gospel?*
6. *What do you think the kingdom of heaven in like?*

The final parable of this series takes on a different tone as the shift is made to law. The kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown and dragged through the water to catch all kinds of fish – the good and the bad. At some point the fish will be separated. Except, Jesus is actually talking about people being thrown into the furnace of fire, "where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:50 NRSV) This parable reminds us of the final judgment of God for which we should take heed.

These parables teach about law and gospel, God's salvation and judgment.

7. *Why is important to learn of both law and gospel?*
8. *What would it be like to only hear the law or the gospel?*

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word *among us*

Three-year-old Billy was in the back yard helping his grandpa plant seeds. Things were not going well. When Billy placed a seed in the soil, then he quickly screamed and picked it up. Despite it all, somehow enough seeds were planted and Billy's grandpa put the soil over the seeds. With that action, Billy wailed uncontrollably. All the adults tried to console young Billy, but nothing helped. Billy's grandpa concluded the whole ordeal was a failure. No one thought Billy heard anything about flowers. But sure enough, when Billy would come for a visit, Billy would dash to the back yard and stand over the planted seeds. Finally, when the flowers bloomed, Billy danced with joy. And so did his grandpa.

1. *What is that like to lose hope over something and have hope restored?*
2. *Describe a time in your life when someone planted a mustard seed, but it took a long time to grow.*
3. *Name a flower, shrub, or tree which describes your faith. Explain.*

Today's passage concludes the lectionary selections from Matthew 13 with its focus on parables. Take a moment to re-read the twin parables concerning the treasure and pearl found in Matthew 13:44-46. Close your eyes and imagine a treasure. Take into account the sacrifice of selling everything you have to obtain the treasure. Reflect on the joy of finding that treasure.

4. *What brings you joy?*
5. *How might the kingdom of heaven bring you joy?*

Take some time to ponder a shopper in search of a rare item during the Christmas holiday season. Imagine searching the internet for that item and walking through stores. Imagine your tired body after such a long search. Now imagine your joy in finding that rare article.

6. *What would you do if you finally completed your search for a rare item?*
7. *How would you share that joy?*
8. *How does this parable help you to understand the kingdom of God?*

Next imagine a warm summer day. Feel the sun on your face. See the fishing boats bringing in nets filled with fish. Watch them separate the fish throwing a bunch overboard. But, this is where the metaphor gets a bit shaky. If we were fish, it would be a good thing to be thrown overboard to live another day in water. But in this metaphor, it is good to be caught.

Through these parables, Jesus encourages us to make good choices in our life and trust in him.

9. *What are these parables saying to you?*
10. *What prayer might come from this passage?*

Prayer

God, it is wonderful to imagine the kingdom of heaven and all of its wonders. Help me to make choices and trust you, so I might experience your joy.

Dig Deeper

Romans 8:35-39

last **word**

Look around for metaphors to describe the kingdom of heaven.
What is the kingdom of heaven like?

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