

# Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

23.07.2017  
By Pádraig Ó Tuama

## Introduction

This is the final section of four weeks exploring the parables of the thirteenth chapter of Mark. For this chapter, Matthew has placed Jesus in a boat, addressing people on the shore. The parables here are mostly about soil and seeds, and foreshadow times of harvest, at which the quality of the fruit will be ascertained.

---

## Text

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

He told them another parable: "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.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. 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.

"Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." And he said to them, "Therefore 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."

---

## Comment

This is the final section of four weeks exploring the parables of the thirteenth chapter of Mark. For this chapter, Matthew has placed Jesus in a boat, addressing people on the shore. The parables here are mostly about soil and seeds, and foreshadow times of harvest, at which the quality of the fruit will be ascertained.

Today's selection from this chapter speaks of small things that grow large, as well as hidden things that are worth pursuing with everything that you have. Looked at as a whole, this lectionary text speaks of humility and dedication. There is a singularity of purpose being put forward.

These sayings contribute to a building intensity in Matthew's gospel's development, as well as painting a picture that is important for this particular take on the story of Jesus: one must be *chosen*. There is a sense of the weeds and the wheat in this text. Some would argue that in order to posit a *chosen* people then there are the inevitable damned unchosen. However, others would say that chosen just means everyone.

This argument about the damned and the few misses the point, however: the focus of Jesus' words is on the fruit that will eventuate. It is actions — not fine words or fine theologies of exclusion — that will show the fruit. Jesus is intervening, perhaps, using wild examples, in abstract conversations about the few, saying that anyone can choose to be the chosen: act according to justice.

The intensity is understandable: this thirteenth chapter that we've been reading for four weeks occurs just before a section where opposition to Jesus is decided as mounting. In order to keep steady — how could a person keep steady in such difficult circumstances— Jesus seems to be speaking as much to himself as to his followers; urging them to spread their good works widely; to know what they wish; to pursue it wholeheartedly; to not be distracted by petty disagreements; to know that they all be seen through their actions, not their words.

Such focus is difficult, especially in the face of persecution, conflict, misunderstandings and pressures. While the gospels are not biographies of Jesus of Nazareth, we see glimpses of what kept him steady in the midst of his conflicts: friendships; early morning prayers; time alone; shared meals; the glorious story of his loved tradition; determination to hold fast to what is just, despite the changes it calls for; and, in all of this, love.

---

## Response

A simple — but difficult — reflection is this:

What do you want?

And:

What do you do in the pursuit of it?

It is a question that might unfold for us over the course of an entire life. Let us hope that we can pursue what is right, what is just, what is good, and what is for the good of all.

---

## Prayer

Jesus, steady one,

how you lived your life,  
with those burdens and beliefs,  
we do not know.

But we know this:  
you kept your heart steady,  
and were distracted neither by fame nor fury.

May we keep steady,  
pursuing that which will help us,  
not harm us;  
what will dignify us,  
not destroy us.

Because you did this,  
and in you,  
we see a life lived  
with the deepest love.

Amen

---

## Further Reading