

July 26, 2020

'No Problem at All!'
(Matthew 13:31-33, 44-50)

Rev. Jane Courtright

As I reread Jesus' telling of the parables in today's gospel, I was reminded of a time when my sister Diana was about three years old or so. She asked me (the expert – I was then about 13 years old!) how babies came to be. I remember telling her how babies were conceived, grew and were born – all of it a biological explanation. She looked at me wide-eyed and silent. I learned later that she understood and remembered nothing of my explanation!

Maybe you have had this experience of trying to understand what a child is really asking and HOW to explain something complicated to a child! For example, Just a couple of weeks ago in Nepal, a landslide and flooding caused by heavy rainfall killed 62 people and left 49 others missing. Children often watch the news or hear of these events! How do you explain to a kid from northern Wisconsin how a landslide happens and what it's like to be in a heavily flooded area?

Perhaps first by telling her that Nepal is very far away and that we are not likely to have such flooding and landslides in Northern Wisconsin. Then, perhaps by showing her how such a natural disaster can happen by using dirt to build a small mountain and using a watering can to pour water on it until there is a mini landslide and flood. Now, **that** the child could understand!

I have watched and read many stories and other ways to explain to children the coronavirus and why we wear masks and spend a lot of time at home!

One story I can recommend is the **New WHO Story Book Helps Explain COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic to Children**. The story follows a girl,

Sara, into a fantasy adventure in which she flies around the world on a friendly dragon. Through their interactions, they address the need for safety and how to deal with anxieties and fears. It also acknowledges how to deal

with missing loved ones, friends and school. The story doesn't shy away from the reality of the virus, including the fact that death is sometimes caused by COVID-19. It talks about the confounding



nature of the virus which causes no symptoms in some while others become severely ill and even die, and how we don't fully understand it yet.

My Hero is You aims to help children find a mental safe space for when they are afraid, and points out that everyone can be a hero right now, by doing their part. I'd love to hear your creative approaches for understanding the coronavirus and avoiding anxiety with children!

When concepts are so big and broad that we have a hard time understanding them, it helps to be given a model, a story or a metaphor. That helps bring the concept down to our size. Then, we can wrap our minds around it!

This is the position Jesus found himself in as he tried to explain to a bunch of ordinary people, mere mortals like us! What could he do? If he were to say what the Realm (Kingdom) of God was like in actual terms, in actual size and scale – well, that would be like me explaining the conception and birth of a baby to my three-year-old sister. It would be like explaining the coronavirus, a landslide or flood in purely scientific or mathematical terms to a small child!

We'd just stare at Jesus with our eyes wide open and have no idea what he was talking about! So, Jesus tells them (AND US) that the Realm of God seems small, but holds the potential to be immense: **like** a mustard seed or a pinch of yeast. It has immense power **like** a pearl or a treasure. This Realm is also **like** a net that embraces all, but separates out. It's **like** a master who clears out his closets and desk drawers.

****Let's be very clear: The Realm of God is **NOT** a seed, or a pinch of yeast, or a pearl, or a net, or a master. IT IS **LIKE** THOSE THINGS.****

Each of those things capture just a glimmer of the Realm, brings it down to a size, a scale we can understand! Because this Realm of God can't be explained in one simple metaphor. It is something that is hard to get our minds around because it is so all encompassing. HUGE. This Realm of God can change everything about our world, our values, our priorities. Our very lives.

*So, what do these metaphors Jesus offers us – **mean**?*
Very simply and briefly (as Jesus told his parables:)

The Realm of Heaven is like a mustard seed. It begins with so little and can grow so much. The seed Jesus describes is now famous. It is one of the tiniest seeds, but the mustard plant can grow anywhere from 6 – 12 feet high!

The Realm of God is like yeast. Or to put it another way, it is like yeast put into flour to make bread. The yeast expands the bread dough many times it's original size! Or, a little bit of the Kingdom of God has a tremendous impact!

The Realm of God is like a treasure. It's worth everything and is hidden just under the surface of the soil of our lives. And when we discover this treasure, life is forever changed. And this is worth our total commitment!

The Realm of God is like a merchant....who went searching and in that search, discovers one pearl worth everything that the merchant already had or could own in the future. In other words, God's Kingdom is worth everything! So, when the merchant found the pearl to end all pearls, nothing else mattered. This pearl went right to the top of his priority list!

Jesus **last** metaphor of what the Realm of God is **like** is a bit more sobering. Because this is like what happens when God's Realm is not found or chosen. This metaphor, the net, is one Jesus' disciples would have especially understood. It would have taken some of them back to their days as fishermen: to the smell of the water, the burn of a rope, the weight of the net as it was dragged through the water.

This image is not of treasures in fields or pearls of great price! This image is of God's net that catches all of us, fish of every kind. Shades of brown and black and white, living in poverty or affluence. All kinds! Whether we like it or not, the good are gathered into the boat and the bad are tossed away. ***How's that for an image?***

Folks of all kinds hanging around. And we have to learn from them whether we like it or not. This final parable is not about rejecting other religions or about rejecting those we judge to have no religion. It's not about disagreeing about 'Black Lives Matter' or 'White Lives Matter' or 'All Lives

Matter. It's not about who wears facemask and who does not. It's not about one group having the only true answers!

It is about the gap between those who choose to make God the center of their lives, and those who choose greed or self above the Realm of God. And this image of hell is not just some afterlife experience. We live in the heavens or hells of our own making.

Jesus also does not describe the Realm of Heaven as some kind of paradise to be lived only **after** we die. Jesus' images of this Realm are so down to earth and very immediate. He tells us over and over again that it can be brought about from tiny beginnings!

So, what is this Realm which is so amazing that people would give their eyeteeth for it? They'd sell all they own? They'd give their whole selves for?

According to Andrew Harvey, author of the book 'Son of Man,' the Realm of God is God's: "Great dream to bring all of creation – every human being and fern and dolphin and stone into the glory of the divine, to take back all things into the all, transfigured by love and justice, and you are with and in God, gathered up and blazing in one flame of love.

This passion is radiant and invincible in you and as you. Every atom of the universe and every being is in God and God in them." This Harvey says, "is the truth of all things and the hope and the beauty and the glory without end. The Realm is now, is here, is the inmost heart-core of reality itself, the fire of love and justice blazing at the heart of all things and beings."

In the Gospel of Thomas, one of many gospels written that didn't find their way into our Bible, Jesus is recorded as saying, "The Realm is inside you and outside you."

Jesus' point in our reading today is that the unique thing about the Realm is not that it is hidden, but that it is **everyday**. Why, if our eyes and ears were open, we could stumble into the Realm every day! That's why Jesus kept saying, "The Realm of God is at hand." The Realm of God **IS** at hand!

However YOU may find this Realm in your life, whether you stumble across it in an everyday task, find it during this Pandemic, discover it finally after a life-long search, or are caught up in it before you realize it!

However you find this Realm, I hope you don't pass up the chance to buy into it. All it will cost is your way of life. But it will be the greatest investment you'll ever make!

What's the problem with finding this Realm?

If you listen to Jesus, it's no problem at all! **No problemo!**

Amen.