Sermon - The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10) A
The Reverend Dale T. Grandfield
July 16, 2017

Genesis 25:19-34
Psalm 119:105-112
Romans 8:1-11
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

“Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.”¹ Savor that for a moment: Jesus on the shore, sitting. A moment of silence before the crowd came looking for him; alone - the place of origins and horizons: the beach. The waves wash in, in and out, a gentle breeze moves, the smell and sight of the water, the edge of the depths - and there, communing with eternity is the man, his simple tunic and cloak caught by the breeze, his hair blown, eyes closed, he sits, arms clasped around his legs against the coolness - the Christ.

He had been preaching the kingdom in cities along the seashore and things hadn’t gone well - the church-folk got upset when he and his disciples plucked wheat to eat and he cured a man in synagogue on the Sabbath; he cured the crowds and cast out demons, but was accused of being evil himself; they wanted him to prove himself by a sign; and then… then his family came from his hometown not that far away to try and reason with him. For all his deeds of power, the people failed to understand who he was, they failed to turn and repent and believe, they failed to recognize the Kingdom of Heaven when it was standing right there among them. And so he went out and sat beside the sea.

I wonder if the shore there was a place of solace for him. I wonder if, like the mountaintop, it was a place where he could find himself in touch again with the depths of his being.

For when the crowds came, looking for more healing, more of his wisdom, it appears he is refreshed. He turns and teaches them in a new way with parables.

_How is the Kingdom’s plan spread around?_ Jesus says: the word of the Kingdom is like, well, seeds tossed around by a seemingly indiscriminate farm-worker who, instead of paying attention to the arability of the land, instead of preparing a place for the seeds with well-turned furrows and fertilizer, goes out, walks along the path and just casts everywhere knowing that some will grow… somewhere.

“How do you teach them in parables,”² the disciples ask in verses omitted from our reading today. _Why use parables_, they ask, seemingly flummoxed by this employment of metaphor to illustrate the Kingdom’s precepts. _Because they don’t get it_, he responds. What better way to make the Kingdom’s plan accessible than than stories?

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¹ Matthew 13:1
² Matthew 13:10
The word of the Kingdom is sown indiscriminately, without respect to where it falls. Some get it, others don’t. And that’s just the way it is. The point is that the word is sown everywhere, and, miraculously finds its way to fertile places. For when it does, the Kingdom germinates with unexpected abundance.

At a recent gathering a woman recounted a trip to Mont Saint-Michel on the Normandy coast; she went seeking an experience of the Holy. But when she got there, she was distressed to find the entire mountain and its old monastic buildings overrun by tourists. It was filled with chatter and people taking selfies and snapping pictures around corners - and disappointed and disgusted she hurried through, until she stepped out onto a balcony where she could see how the tide had gone out all around and people were able to walk out onto the dry sand where sea water had been not so long ago. There, she said, she was moved by God - overwhelmed by the presence of the Holy.

The word of the Kingdom is tossed around like an indiscriminate sower tosses seed along a path - some falls here, some there. Sometimes when we are open to it, even in the most unexpected places, it germinates, puts down roots and grows; sometimes it takes the tide going out, even when the tourists are flocking.

We would like a concrete answer to how God is working God’s purpose out. *Tell us how the Kingdom will come, and make it clear!* There is apparently nothing clear about it, nothing easily explicable - it’s nearly nonsense, really, the stuff of poetry. Because what is possible for God seems impossible to us. Yet the Kingdom will arrive, it will grow it will spread until earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea:

Revel in the mystery. Revel in the unpredictable-ness of how the word of the Kingdom falls on you and on those around you: it could be here - it could be anywhere - that you will discover that the word is very near you and is already growing strong in your heart and mind.

Revel in the mystery and open yourself to God.

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3 Cf. Matthew 19:26  
4 Cf. Romans 10:8