

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like...”**  
**by Pastor Matt Johnson, 7/26/2020**

What is the Kingdom of Heaven?

Is it the visible churches on earth and the ground they occupy?

I think we can give that a pretty firm, “no.”

Is it the people who claim Jesus as their Lord and Savior?

I certainly think they have been invited to enter into the Kingdom.

Is it the influence that the church has on the world?

It’s reasonable to think that could be part of it, too.

But is that all the Kingdom of Heaven is?

If the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God is only  
the people who follow God explicitly and their influence on others,  
then why would Jesus spend so much time  
explaining it with such strange stories?

Why would we hear of the difficult search for it?

Why would we hear of the great cost of it?

Why would Jesus invite people to *enter* it?

Why would we hear of it’s mysterious growth?

Why would it be compared to a field or a net,  
rather than to the harvest or the fish?

The Wednesday Bible Study group – which you’re welcome to join! –  
had a good discussion about this passage.

I asked them what we know about parables and this is what they said:

They explain what is happening in terms of a story

Parables include a surprise – that causes us to question

I asked them why Jesus taught in parables?

They replied that they are easy to remember.

Teaching in this way allowed him to convey things  
in terms people understood, and were relatable.

Easy to understand and yet, they are also mysterious, aren't they?

I think Jesus wanted to tell these surprising, question filled stories

about everyday things because they are like a trojan horse.

They sneak in behind our defenses and surprise us with the truth  
when we least expect it.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grandparent quarantining themselves  
for two weeks and driving for hours just to see their new grandchild  
– not even able to hold her.

New life and new generations are sacred.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like that.

The kingdom of heaven is like Veda Gill, a Pakistani Christian  
who is a mission co-worker with the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Veda coordinates the operation of around 15 schools in Pakistan  
that are ministries of the Presbyterian Church USA  
called the Presbyterian Education Board, or PEB.

These schools emphasize Christian based education for girls,  
and yet many Muslim girls and boys attend them as they offer  
the best education opportunities available.

Veda lives in Lahore, just about a 5 minute walk from the park  
where a suicide bomber killed over 70 people on Easter Sunday in 2016.

And now the pandemic has wiped out their funding stream  
and they struggle to pay their teachers.

She has not been deterred from her mission,

but continues providing the highest level of education  
for Muslim and Christian girls and boys

regardless of the opposition she encounters.

**[Insert the first 1:18 seconds of Veda Gill – PEB update video]**

The Kingdom of heaven is like Veda Gill and PEB.

Kingdom of heaven is like Eboo Patel,  
a second generation Indian-American Muslim.  
He saw the violence of religious extremism  
and decided to do something about it.

Through mentors and partners who were Christian, Buddhist, Hindu,  
Jewish, and Muslim, he developed the Interfaith Youth Core –  
which calls for youth to “engage in social action and reflect  
on how their different traditions inspired that.”







Eboo Patel does not suggest that all religions are the same,  
but that all religions have resources that  
can contribute to peace and wellbeing.

He is mobilizing youth to serve others  
in order to recognize areas of commonality  
and work toward human flourishing together  
and resist the terrors of religious extremism.

The Kingdom of heaven is like Eboo Patel.

The Kingdom of heaven is like members from our local community  
who lined the streets to honor the return a fallen soldier, Alexander Klass,  
who died in a non-combat incident on in Kosovo on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020.



Congregation members Dianne and Elliot Barske were among  
the many who gathered. Dianne noted on Facebook:

“Quietly waiting, then all standing - to honor and welcome  
a fallen soldier home to McMinnville.

Hundreds lined the streets in a moment of unity and caring - children, parents,  
grandparents- no chanting, no protest signs.

After the escort procession, I walked away,

so proud of this good community we now call home.”







In a time of great political division,  
people came together to quietly mourn together the loss of a young life,  
and to show support for Alexander Klass' family and friends.

The Kingdom of heaven is like a community that forgot about their divisions  
to mourn together.

Kingdom of heaven is like  
Colin Kaepernick, who took a knee during the National Anthem  
in the NFL to draw attention to the death of young black men  
at the hands of authorities long before it was cool to do so.



He lost his job and never got it back.



But this weekend during the national anthem  
the Yankees & Nationals baseball teams all took a knee.

[Insert kneeling baseball video attachment]

Add text "video credit ESPN

<https://twitter.com/espn/status/1286452623143469057>"

What started very small has grown very large.  
The Kingdom of heaven is like that.

The Kingdom of heaven is like The Moms in Portland on Friday night,  
recognizing that if they don't stand up to the injustice  
of the criminal justice system, their own child or their neighbor's child  
could be next.

Do you hear the voices of heaven's angels in the beauty, pain, and longing  
of their lullaby? "Hands up please don't shoot me."

[Insert mom's lullaby video attachment]

Add text "video credit Sergio Olmos

<https://twitter.com/MrOlmos/status/1286525132274425856>"

The Kingdom of Heaven is like that.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a young conducting student  
who travels an hour from his home every day to give his heart and soul  
in service to God. He squeezed every drop of beauty and wonder  
that he could from the music program  
of a little church in McMinnville.  
Even in the midst of a pandemic!

The Kingdom of Heaven is like that.



The Kingdom of Heaven is not a theological statement, it's not a political ideal.  
It's not even just people or their influence.  
It's the arena, the sphere of life  
where the reign of God  
is made apparent among us,  
where we see the qualities of life lived in harmony  
with God on display,  
where courage, sacrifice, love, grace, forgiveness,  
and reconciliation emerge against great odds.  
You can't control it, you can't force it, but when you see it  
breaking in it's worth everything you've got to share in it.  
You can announce it – there it is!  
You see the whole world anew as a result of it.

I submit to you that the kingdoms of this world cannot offer that.  
When you see it, whoever is involved, whatever their theological beliefs,  
whatever their politics,  
you see a little bit of God's gracious, merciful,  
loving, renewing and re-orienting life  
breaking into our world.

I suppose it should stand to reason that we don't control the Kingdom of Heaven,  
because we aren't the King of heaven!

This is why we cannot be concerned to separate out "who is in" and "who is out"  
when it comes to life with God. That is God's job – not ours.  
It's a freeing thing to be relieved  
of having to be the judge, isn't it?

Where do you see the Kingdom of Heaven breaking in?  
What would you give to join in and share in it?  
What barriers have you erected to preventing it from breaking  
into your own life and community?  
How can you discover and share in the abundant life  
that God is welcoming us into today?