

## Weekly Bible Study group – February 4, 2009

### *This week's reading assignment: Matthew 13-16*

Reflection by Bob Zurinsky, SPU Center for Worship

In our passage of Matthew this week we come to some of the most famous teachings of Jesus – **the parables**. Many of us grew up in church and we are at least familiar with the parables. But I know that for myself, I never thought about them too much. And I certainly never understood any bigger themes running through them. I just thought of them as interesting, yet disconnected, stories about how to live a faithful life.

But wait! There's something going on here. Here's a clue to the bigger picture... all of these parables begin with the same opening line: "The kingdom of heaven is like..." That's huge. As it turns out, these parables aren't just disconnected teachings. They are all about the same thing. And that same thing is nothing other than "the kingdom of heaven/God" – the same topic that we've heard Jesus preaching about ever since his baptism in the Jordan River in chapter 3.

Not only here, but everywhere else too: the kingdom of God is what Jesus proclaimed in his entire ministry. It's what Jesus himself called "the gospel" or "the good news." How do you respond when someone asks you what "the gospel" is? You might try answering that question like Jesus did – it's the *good news about God's kingdom*! If that's the case, I think we'd better start learning about this kingdom.

So what do we learn about the kingdom from these parables? Lots of things I'm sure. But here is one of the main points that links many of these parables together: the kingdom of God begins as a small and insignificant seed planted in the ground, but before you know it you turn around and it's become a huge tree. Or to put it another way, the kingdom of God is like a little bit of yeast that is kneaded into a ball of dough. It's so small you can't see it, but pretty soon it's everywhere and it changes the whole ball of dough into a fluffy piece of almost-bread.

Here's what this means (at least in part). Like all the prophets of Israel who came before him, Jesus proclaimed that a time was coming when God would step into history and make things right. For now we endure pain and suffering and injustice, but a day is coming when God will come onto the scene and transform everything. This is the great hope. This is the final *kingdom of God* on earth. It's our future.

But the message of Jesus is that it's already here too. Except, you can't quite see it yet. It's here, but it's just a small seed hidden in the ground. It's here, but it's like invisible yeast in a ball of dough. It's here already whenever God's children live in reconciliation and peace and love. But it hasn't quite taken over the earth yet. That part is still to come. But come it will! And Jesus assures us that even now we're living a part of the kingdom. We are living the future. We are living our destiny, every single time we choose the way of Jesus Christ instead of the way of the world. It's pretty epic, really. When we repent and choose God's story instead of our own, we become **the people of the future!**

### Questions to ponder this week:

Read each parable. What does it teach you about God's kingdom? How do you see this reality in your life and in the world today?