

11 Pentecost  
Sermon for July 27, 2008  
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Genesis 29:15-28  
Psalm 105:1-11,45b  
Romans 8:26-39  
Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

The Kingdom of Heaven is like...what?

What is the Kingdom of Heaven like for you? Think about it for a minute, and I'll ask you again.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like: A mustard seed. A women mixing yeast. A hidden treasure found in a field. A merchant looking for a pearl. ... A net that catches many fish. ... The master of a household and his treasure, both old and new.

Maybe the similes Jesus uses are just dated. Let's try a few new ones. The Kingdom of Heaven is like:

- Finding a winning Powerball ticket on the sidewalk.
- Buying a used car only to find out it's was really well taken care of.
- Getting up in the morning and finding out it's a snow day.

So help me out here, what comes to mind when I ask you: What is the Kingdom of Heaven like?

Tell me what you think: (push for responses and comment).

Have any of you ever heard of multiflora roses? That's what I think the Kingdom of Heaven is like: multiflora roses.

I always knew them as rose bushes. My grandmother had one in her back yard. It flowered with white and pink blossoms. It was really pretty most of the year. They were introduced into the United States in the late 1860s from Asia as decorative plant, and, well, in the 1930s the Soil and Water Conservation Service advocated the use of multiflora roses on farms. My grandfather bought into the Agricultural Services line. That's where my grandmother's rose bush came from. But that was not the end of it.

The government said that the multiflora rose would be perfect for making natural "living fences" for livestock, for erosion control and good cover for wildlife. The government was so enamored of multiflora roses that they virtually gave the plants away, which was truly attractive to my grandfather. So he planted them along the cattle trails, and along the existing fences.

Fast forward thirty years. If you were here last week, you heard me talk about the summer month my brother and I spent on the family farm helping my grandfather. In addition to the garden there were two other tasks that we were charged with, and one of them was digging up multiflora roses.

You see, multiflora roses are a hardy lot. They grow in twining branches, the end of which can start another plant. The branches intertwine and the roots are very deep. And they have more thorns than most roses. The other problem is that they reproduce by seeds. A typical plant produces a million seeds a year. And birds eat the seeds and where they leave their droppings, well, that's where new multiflora roses grow.

In the thirty years I spoke of, the multiflora roses had grown all over the farm. We would spend hour upon hour digging up young multiflora roses. When they had gotten way out of hand, we'd run a rod under the branches, lift them up, and slide a chain around the bush's base, and pull it up by the roots using my grandfather's John Deere tractor.

It seemed like we never made real headway against the roses. They persist, they endure. That's what the Kingdom is for me: no matter what the powers of darkness might do, the kingdom persists, growing anew each day; spreading though it is cut back.

You choose to plant the Kingdom of God in your heart and in the hearts of those you love, and it grows. It grows like multiflora roses in places you'd never expect, in people you'd never suspect of working for the Kingdom.

I believe we are given free will by God. We are not predestined for salvation. We must choose to accept the call of God.

That's the beauty that shines out from today's Romans reading. "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." By the way, a more accurate translation from the Greek for "work together" would be mingle.

When we are seeded with the Kingdom of God, we are all called by God, and we choose to work for the Kingdom. How we choose to work is always a dilemma, because not all of our choices are necessarily the best ones. But in many ways that doesn't matter.

When we choose to answer the call from God, God mingles good with whatever we choose to do and works through us. That doesn't mean that life becomes easy. Life may actually become more difficult.

The consolation comes from the promise of Christ to be with us. The consolation is that no matter the choices we make in our lives, when we work through the Holy Spirit, those choices are mingled with God's goodness for a better outcome than would be possible otherwise.

We are promised that the mingling of our lives with the goodness of God through Christ will fill our hearts and minds and provide us with a compass for navigating the choices we must make in this life.

As Paul writes: “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

We are so mingled with the goodness of Christ that we cannot be separated from that goodness.

As it says in that anthem known as St. Patrick’s Breastplate:

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,  
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise,  
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,  
Christ in every eye that sees me,  
Christ in every ear that hears me.

We are the children of God. We have been seeded like multiflora roses into the fabric of this world to plant the Kingdom of God in the here and now.

What is the Kingdom of God like? Look around you.