

**“DO YOU GET IT?”**  
**Matthew 13:31-33; 44-52**  
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**Wilton Presbyterian Church**  
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During his ministry, Jesus often spoke to his listeners in stories, parables. In our scripture lesson this morning, he also used similes... as a way to get his point across, because for many it was/and is easier to hear the truth when we're not being hit over the head with it! We get to, in a sense, overhear the story. I love the way one of my mentors says it, "Say the truth, but say it slant!" Sometimes we need that. And still, with the parables, Jesus' followers STILL didn't get it, oftentimes. Do you get it? Jesus asked the disciples that question/and asks us... and most often, the answer either spoken or unspoken was/is NO.

So, to begin, let's look at a little at the context of the passage to understand more:

Jesus referred to the Kingdom of Heaven 29 times in this Gospel alone. Most scholars agree the phrase "Kingdom of Heaven" has the same meaning as Luke and Mark's reference to the Kingdom or Reign of God. Some scholars think that because Matthew's audience was mostly Jewish, he avoided using the name "God" with them, which would have been offensive ~~ and so he used the word "heaven."

But what are we talking about here? What is the Reign or Kingdom of Heaven? Some define it as "a process, a course of events, which brings in the world as God sees it." But it's really simply the basis of the teachings of Jesus as a way of life, what we're called to help create now as disciples of Jesus.

For some, The Kingdom of Heaven begins in the end times... But, for those of us in modern progressive, mainline churches, we believe that time, the reign of God, the Kingdom of heaven, is here and now – that we play a part in what is and what is to come, and while the full reign of God won't be complete now, it is our responsibility to work for justice NOW, to change the systems which are oppressive to others NOW, to begin redeeming those parts of the world which need redeeming. It reminds me of the phrase from Jewish Tradition attributed to Rabbi Tarfon: "You are not obligated to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it."

Bringing about the Reign of Heaven is the impetus behind all our mission work... it's why we go and serve. Think about it... why did this congregation go for all those years to MATE (Mission At The Eastward) in Maine? Was it just for exercise, or to feel good? No. It was to help bring about economic justice and to help others enjoy a home they could not otherwise have afforded. The same thing is true with our work in building homes in Nicaragua. Those families were able to have a home with a tile floor and a roof, security for their belongings, because we shared resources of time, energy and money to help. They, in turn, gave us meaning, a fulfillment of calling, connection, and an example of gratitude which we will always remember.

When we cook and serve food at Open Doors shelter, or do mentoring projects, or go on a midnight run in Manhattan, serving the working poor, we are doing the work which Jesus talked about during his ministry.

Bringing about the reign of God, the Kingdom of God, is why people are protesting right now for reform of systems which have treated brown and black people differently from white people for hundreds of years. It's why white people are being asked to look at how white privilege and

power, how the system of white supremacy keeps us blind and prevents the full realization of the kingdom of heaven from coming to be.

So those are some examples of what is the Kingdom of Heaven looks like in a group setting, but what does it look like on an individual level?

I listened to a vlog on Facebook by a woman named Bertice Berry. If you don't know of her, I encourage you to go and find her. She has a lot to say. She's a sociologist, author and former talk show host, and her 3-4 minute videos are extremely powerful. In this particular vlog, she tells the story about the years she worked cleaning houses after school and on weekends. She recalls a particular day she had gone with an older woman to clean a house... when she was there, and while cleaning, she noticed the homeowner's children watching cartoons. She was cleaning but lingering in the background watching the cartoons... because she said they were really good. She then says, *"Then, suddenly the mother walked up and turned the television off. She began to chastise me and told her children to go and watch the television back in the den. She looked at me and said, 'you need to know your place.'* As she was chastising me, her children had their heads bowed down in shame. And her son on the way out looked back at me and mouthed the words, *'I'm sorry.'*" She says she felt bad and that her feelings were hurt. She told the older woman with her cleaning who reiterated, "Yeah, you need to know your place. You're not there to watch cartoons." She vowed then, that if she ever were to have a cleaning person, she would never treat her or her children that way.

Years later when she was a young mom of four young children, she had hired a woman to come and help do the cleaning. She overheard her on the phone, speaking in Spanish, saying she wanted to take this job but needed someone to watch her child on the weekends. She hung up and asked Dr. Berry if it would be ok if she brought her daughter on

Saturdays. She said her daughter was a very good worker and that she could get to the low baseboards and things she couldn't get to as well. Berry, told the woman, "She doesn't need to clean, she can just come." No, no, no, she replied.

The woman brought her daughter... about age 10... the same age as one of Dr. Berry's children. Berry asked her if it was ok if her daughter could join her children for breakfast? The woman said... sure... their kids were getting along nicely. Her kids then went in to watch cartoons... and the little girl came in with the bucket. Berry said, go on in and watch with them... the mom said, "no, no, no she's going to work." Berry responded, "Let her watch with my kids, please! They need some friends!"

After the woman finished cleaning the house, Berry asked the woman if it was ok for her daughter to stay for the rest of the day. The kids were playing together so nicely. The woman began to cry and said, "No one has been this nice to me. Thank you so much."

Berry concludes with urging the viewers to choose or create the space you and I want to live in. We can choose to be any of the characters in that story... the homeowner who demeaned others, the son who was ashamed, Berry who took it in but didn't continue the cycle...

For that to happen Jesus taught that our inner lives need to be in alignment with our actions... In Matthew Chapter 6, Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there is your heart also." So, once again, we are reminded that the spiritual journey is a flow between the inner and outer life. The reign of God can only **come to be to the extent that inner lives of the individuals working toward it are aligned with what we do.**

We must do the inner work first, otherwise our actions may be done from a resentful or even condescending heart.

Do you get it?

In his book, ***Across That Bridge: A Vision for Change and the Future of America***, Representative John L. Lewis, who died last week said this:

*“You are a light. You are the light. Never let anyone—any person or any force—dampen, dim or diminish your light. Study the path of others to make your way easier and more abundant. Lean toward the whispers of your own heart, discover the universal truth, and follow its dictates. [...] Release the need to hate, to harbor division, and the enticement of revenge. Release all bitterness. Hold only love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the battle of good to overcome evil is already won. Choose confrontation wisely, but when it is your time don't be afraid to stand up, speak up, and speak out against injustice. And if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a Beloved Community that is finally at peace with itself.”*

Do you get it?

So, what in your inner life needs to shift, so you may be a bigger part of bringing in the reign of Heaven? And what in your outer life needs to change so you may bring about the reign of heaven?

Alleluia Amen!!