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Gospel lesson

We continue in Jesus's parable series from:



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/parables-kingdom-heaven/>;
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Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

NRSV

³¹ He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field;

³² it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

³³ He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls;

⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind;

⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad.

⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous

⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes."

⁵² And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

The Word of God for the people of God

<Children's/Interactive time>

Can you tie a shoelace? <Let them respond>

Where else might you tie a bow? <Let them respond>

Can you make a sandwich? What kind(s)?
<Let them respond>

Do you know how to cross a street safely?

<Let them respond>

It is important to look for traffic in all directions before crossing a street. Where else might you need to look for traffic? <Let them respond>

Learning one thing enabled you to do more things. Do you think it is useful to be able to do those things for yourself? <Let them respond>

Have you helped someone else with any of those things? <Let them respond>

How does it feel to see someone doing things you taught them? <Let them respond>

Where did you first hear about Jesus, the Good News, and sharing God's love? <Let them respond>

Where have you shared the Good News and/or God's love? <Let them respond>

Have you helped someone else to share God's love? <Let them respond>

How does it feel to see someone else sharing God's love after you shared it with them? <Let them respond>

Like planting a mustard seed or mixing yeast into flour, the acts of love we do can grow into something far greater than what we first worked with. God uses the love we share to bless the world – and nothing is greater than the kingdom of heaven, where love

abounds. May we always say “Yes!” to God’s invitation to enter into that holy kingdom and share love abundantly, as we have received it.

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<Hymn “Cry of My Heart”

TFWS #2165>

Message: More Than Conquerors



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/core-faith/week-4-ninth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a/week-4-ninth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-core-faith-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Extravagant Lord of Life,

as we take time now to further consider today’s scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That in setting our attention on You, we may prioritize Your love more fully every day and inspire others to seek Your grace too. Amen.

We conclude our “Core Faith” series today as “More Than Conquerors.”

“This reflection on Romans 8 invites the church to wrestle honestly with suffering, hope, and God’s grace.

It reframes being “more than conquerors” not as power or triumph, but as redemption through Christ and deep belonging in community, where the Spirit

intercedes, sustains, and draws us closer to God and one another.”

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While that is true of Romans today, “closer to God” was not my gut reaction on reading the Old Testament lesson today. Putting aside the cultural misogyny and the treating of women as little more than livestock to be bought, we have the uncle Laban undermining his deal with Jacob, and we have grasping Jacob taking and taking more and more from his uncle.

If you read the whole story of Jacob and his father-in-law, their relationship was a series of dirty dealings to outsmart one another, with Jacob generally ending up on top. And yet, we do see God’s grace at work despite their shenanigans.

- ✝ Both Laban and Jacob worked hard for the overall family to prosper.
- ✝ Laban sought to place both of his daughters well, rather than leaving one unwed in a culture that placed value on women relative to their husbands.
- ✝ Jacob did not divorce or abandon Leah, but rather:
 - supported her,
 - demonstrated that she was worth as much as her sister by working an additional seven years for his second wife, and
 - enabled Leah to have status in the family through the bearing of children.

I find the further story interesting, because in the naming of her children, it sounds like Leah actually loved Jacob and wanted his love in return.

God blessed all of them for the good that they did do; their livelihood prospered and the family grew – Jacob had children and Laban got grandchildren. The psalmist praises God for continuing to keep the covenant and bless the family abundantly, eventually making a kingdom out of them.

Jesus talks at length in the passage today about how desirable the kingdom of heaven is – that is, the kingdom where God is the ruler of all. The Source of all Life takes the least good that we do – like planting a tiny seed, or putting a bit of yeast in dough – and multiplies its effect beyond what we can, to be a blessing for all that encounter it.

But not all that we do is good; we are prone to sinning. So when we enter the kingdom of heaven, God will eliminate all of our sin – burning it off in the furnace of fire – so that the holy goodness in which we were created can shine instead.

If we cling to sin instead of to God, we will get burned, for that is the means by which unrepentant sinners choose to get cleansed. How very much more wonderful it is to let Jesus help us be freed from sin for love instead!

Paul writes about how the Holy Spirit “helps us in our weakness, [interceding] with sighs too deep for words...For those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.”

Who does God foreknow? The Creator of all, the omnipresent Spirit, knows us all from when we were

formed in our mother's womb. All of humanity is called to be know and love God through Jesus – and nothing, not any thing, is “able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

To be in that loving relationship with God, to thus enter the kingdom of heaven, is worth far more than anything we could own on this earth. We are more than conquerors in the face of any challenge you can name, for Christ walks through it with us.

We have life in heaven – good and holy relationships based on love bringing us to more than we can even imagine now – awaiting our arrival. What we bring with us into that life depends on the love we share in this one. If we learn how to tie a shoe, we can tie bows on other things for security and decoration.

What skills of love are you developing now, to bring to the Lord and put to use for the glory of God's kingdom? God's love is precious, seek it out and share it, that it may grow into more!

God blesses us abundantly from even the tiniest start; nothing is greater than God's love.

This week, I invite you to:

- ✝ Hold fast to God's love. Count your blessings. Consider situations that frustrate you – what blessings are buried within them?
- ✝ Point out the blessings of God to others – especially those blessings that they are sharing with you and the community.
- ✝ Note how God brings good out of even the worst

situations, and how important it is to turn to God in all things – especially those worst situations.

✝ Pray for one another with love and humble hearts.

✝ When you are feeling on top, give God thanks!
Do not shove a conquering attitude or present yourself as being better than others at anyone, for we are more than conquerors.

Instead, invite others to share the freely given love of God and the glory of God's kingdom in fellowship and joy. All are called, none are forced, and nothing can prevent the love of God from reaching those who seek it.