



July 27 • 2008

**Focus Scripture**

**Matthew 13:31–34,**

**44–52**

**Additional Scriptures**

Genesis 29:15–28

Psalm 128

Romans 8:26–39

Surprising God, is your presence like yeast, or engulfing weeds, or reckless investment, or indiscriminate fishing? As we ponder your reign among us, demand our attention and inspire our service. Alert and revitalized, we thank you. Amen.

# Pictures of God's Realm

Sometimes Jesus' teaching used familiar images in unfamiliar ways to help disciples understand the extraordinary value and unexpected shape of the reign of God, which is among us now and is also yet to come. God's way is full of surprises, bringing forth great things from small beginnings. Such treasure is for everyone.

**Focus Scripture: Matthew 13:31–34, 44–52**

Today's focus passage includes short, sharp parables that expand Jesus' teaching about God's reign (the kingdom of heaven), perhaps intended to be heard as a unit.

Jesus' images may astonish and challenge. Mustard can be considered a weed. One seed quickly produces sufficient plants to overwhelm a field. Would a careful farmer plant a weed seed in a productive field? Perhaps the parable imagines mustard shrubs as "cedars of Lebanon," and nesting birds as all nations gathering in God's realm (see Ezekiel 17).

Yeast – a potentially poisonous fungi – leavens flour to make bread, yet makes it spoil faster. Also, in Jesus' time, yeast was a symbol for corruption. The yeast is hidden in a generous amount of flour – three measures would be about 25 kilograms/50 pounds. How can yeast leaven so much?

Hidden treasure has value when shared. Who could keep it to oneself? A merchant, seeing the fine pearl, might recall prudent financial practice – spread investments to minimize loss. Would an experienced merchant place one's total wealth in a single investment?

Fishing for every kind of fish breaks all conventions. Nets are woven to catch particular species. Sorting through the full range of species to pull out what is edible would be unnecessarily time consuming. Would fishermen break with expected practice?

These images support each other in conveying that the presence or reign of God is not what people expect, yet it is of the greatest value. God's grace is world-shattering and overwhelming! Again in this text, Matthew includes a word of seeming judgment (verses 49–50), perhaps to encourage acceptance of Jesus' authority or to encourage believers to evaluate their own lives. The expansion of God's realm to all

humankind is grounded in the hope-filled treasure of God's grace and compassion. Matthew's writing is confident that such a treasure should not be ignored or refused.

After speaking these seven parables, Jesus asks the disciples if they understand, and they respond, "Yes" (verse 51). Matthew expected the reign of God to grow through teaching and learning. Disciples are called as scribes (verse 52) – learning from, preserving, and interpreting Jesus' teaching.

Jesus' teaching about God's reign drew on tradition, including stories and interpretations of the Law and also images and experiences of everyday life. This suggests an approach for our own teaching. Making the treasure of God's presence known invites dialogue among tradition, scripture, and experience.

What other pictures of God's realm come to us through scripture? In **Genesis 29:15–28** and **Psalm 128**, we imagine God who keeps commitments. In **Romans 8:26–39**, Paul paints a picture of the love and compassion that comes in God's time. Nothing can separate us from God's love, even when the picture of present time includes difficult and challenging situations.

The reign of God is about God's active presence, not our situation in life. Our faithfulness to God reflects God's faithfulness to us. God desires to fill the whole creation with God's love and compassion. We are just one small part of that experience.



The good news of God's reign is for everyone. What images from Christian tradition and life experience might you use to describe this vision? How might you do this in ways that preserve the integrity of your culture, yet present the good news of God's saving love?

Go to [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) and click on Spirit Sightings for international current events, links to this week's theme, discussion questions, and intercessory prayer suggestions.

