

Rev. Lynne Ogren Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
July 26, 2020 8th Sunday after Pentecost, Year A Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

The kingdom of heaven is like a member of a church who reads the local paper, and when she sees the name of a child of the congregation on the school honor roll or on the sports page or under their 4-H photo, she quickly sits down and sends the child a letter in the mail with words of congratulations and blessing. And as those children grow, they know that there are people who know them and care for them, and they become adults who know how to affirm and bless others.

The kingdom of heaven is like a neighbor who calls the elderly person who lives alone to make sure he has what he needs for the day. And as they visit on the phone or on the porch, the neighbor who serves steps out of the larger worries of the world and grows in compassion and care.

The kingdom of heaven is like a young parent, changing the diaper of their infant child for what seems like the umpteenth time that day. It's a messy one, and the house is messy, and the dishes in the sink have piled up, and she can't remember the last time she took a shower without someone needing her urgently.

And as she changes that messy diaper, the parent sings a song and makes funny noises and looks into the eyes of her wiggly baby and the child knows that he is more important than a clean house or a tidy kitchen or even the parent. The child knows he is loved beyond measure.

The kingdom of heaven is like a teenager who mows lawns with his dad. He has to use the push mower uphill in some yards! It's hard work and he wonders if it's worth it. And over that summer the teen becomes more comfortable talking with the folks who have hired them. He learns to see his work as being more valuable than the money he and his dad earn.

The young man's heart is growing into a servant's heart that will, for the rest of his life, notice and respond to the needs of others with the skills and experience he has to offer.

It's the little things, Jesus tells us, that God uses to make a big difference in the world. In Matthew's gospel heaven represents the fullness of God and the kingdom is every place that is touched by God's dynamic activity. The kingdom of heaven is not another place or a time in the future, the kingdom of heaven has come near now in the person of Jesus Christ, and in those who belong to him.

Jesus uses the ordinary to bring about extraordinary change and growth. He healed with a little bit of mud and some saliva from his own mouth. He brought people into community by eating a meal with them. And often it was a kind word or a gentle touch that gave people a new lease on life.

The kingdom of heaven is found in the basics—a quick note sent in the mail, a phone call or picking up a few more things when we go to the grocery store, the everyday tasks of family

life, and doing the work we have before us with an attitude of care for those who benefit from it.

We are always learning how God might be calling us to participate in the kingdom of heaven. It changes from season to season in our lives. It changes in the life of our church. The ways we gather and engage as a congregation is different these days, and we are tasked, as Jesus' followers were, to bring out of our treasure what is old and what is new.

In these times when we gather differently than we did 6 months ago, we must decide on what we can keep and continue to use and to do, and what we must set aside or do differently. What new resources do we have these days? Who might we include who has not be invited before? How might God be calling us into new areas of ministry?

My guess is that any of the answers to these questions will lead us back to the basics—who we are as neighbors, family members, and citizens of this community—and who we are as God's beloved children. It is likely we already have what we need. God may just be calling us into new ways to apply our interests, our experience, our skills, and our resources.

The kingdom of heaven has come near. God's dynamic activity is present in and among us right now! Let us join in with what God is up to to bring life, hope, and healing!

Thanks be to God! Amen