

Still Growing, Still Held, Never Stuck

Good morning, my dear friends. While we are all together in this summer heat, I want you to trust that I will keep it short, even though this is my absolute favourite part of our time together. Because we have guests this morning, I will explain a bit about what we'll do here. My work, for now, is all about healing. As far as I can see, the only fully healed human was Jesus. The rest of us, no matter where we are along the pathway to being fully operational humans, still would benefit from some 'wound' healing. I feel that, just as 'hurt people hurt people', 'healed people heal people'. Now, the wounds that need healing are different for each one of us and I'll leave it to you and God to uncover and bandage what that might be. Healing is a funny thing. Perhaps a wound is best covered with a bandage of strong old opinions? Perhaps that old sore spot needs to be exposed to the air? Perhaps it needs a good solid safety brace of 'how it used to be'.

Somewhere along the way, we may have been sold a story about healing. And the story goes like this: "To be real, healing should be dramatic. One really good prayer, one heartfelt altar call, one good cry, and then, DONE. Fixed. Ready to testify."

And can I offer what happens when healing does NOT show up like that?

We start to think something's wrong with us. We start to think everybody else got the lightning-bolt healing, and we're still just... slow. Still tender in the same place. Still asking the same question we were asking last year.

If that's you this morning, I need you to hear me before we go one sentence further:

Slow is not the same as standing still. Moving slowly doesn't mean you aren't moving. Slow is not the same thing as stuck.

Because our text this morning, this little handful of parables in Matthew 13, is not about lightning. It's about seeds. It's about yeast. It's about a merchant who spends years looking before he ever finds his pearl. Jesus is trying to tell us something about how healing actually moves.

There is a part of our scripture today that makes me smile every single time I hear it. In Matthew, after all the parables have been told, Jesus asks "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." So, we should be done, except, perhaps for the 2000 years that separates us from all of those clearly understandable stories. So we talk about them one more time.

The Seed and the Yeast

Look at Matthew 31. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds planted in a field. It grows slowly, underground, where nobody's watching, before it's ever big enough for birds to nest in its branches.

Then Jesus doubles down. The kingdom is also like yeast worked into three measures of flour. First of all, that's a LOT of flour... about 50 lbs or for the more modern among us ... 22 kg. It probably would have made fifty or even 100 loaves of bread and been very difficult to push around. However, yeast doesn't need us to work. There's no lightning bolt in a bowl of dough, a little mixing ... and then time, warmth, and waiting, until the whole thing has risen and you probably missed watching it happen.

Here's why this matters. We live inside a culture that hands us real gifts: your story is your own, your voice matters, you get to ask questions nobody used to have permission to ask. That's a good gift, and I won't stand up here and pretend otherwise. But that same culture has a shadow side. It whispers underneath the first message a second one: *if you're not healed yet, that's on you*. "Optimize" it. Journal harder. "Therapy" your way out by next quarter, please. And if you're still hurting, still doubting, still grieving, still asking the same question, the fear creeps in that we're failing at our own healing.

Jesus does not let us believe that misunderstanding this morning. The seed doesn't grow because it worked hard. Something is happening to it that is bigger than its own effort. The yeast will act on the flour. **The kingdom is growing whether we can see it moving or not.**

By the way, that's not permission to be passive. It's permission to stop measuring our healing by the clock of a culture that was not built to be patient with us. Please know that healing is not a task to be done well. Healing is a process that takes us with it.

Solomon's Prayer

Now, in 1 Kings chapter 3. God comes to Solomon in a dream and says, "Ask me for whatever you want."

If that had been us, some of us have a list ready. We would've asked God to just settle it. Settle the doubt, settle the grief, settle the argument we've been having with ourselves about whether the faith we were handed still fits the way it used to.

But listen to what Solomon asks for instead. Verse 9: *"Give your servant an understanding mind... that I may discern between good and evil."* He doesn't ask for certainty. He asks for **discernment**.

Some of us came to faith as a finished package. It offers us, "Here's what's true, here's who's in, don't ask too many questions, just believe it and for heaven's sake, believe harder. And that kind of faith can hold a person for a long season. It's not nothing.

But for a lot of us, somewhere along the way, the package stops fitting. Life gets complicated in ways the neat answers didn't prepare us for. And when that happens, some of us grip the old answers tighter, and some of us just walk away from the whole thing.

Solomon shows us a third way. He doesn't ask God for a finished faith. He asks for a heart that can keep discerning. **That is healing too.** Healing isn't always God removing the questions. Sometimes healing is God giving us a wiser, steadier way of holding those questions.

Then, on the subject of tears Psalm 119:136: *"My eyes shed streams of tears because your law is not kept."*

That's not somebody checked out. Look back at verse 129, "Your decrees are wonderful." This is somebody who loves what God is doing in the world so much that watching it get trampled makes them weep.

We need to hear this: **tears are not evidence that our faith is broken. Tears can be evidence that our faith is awake and watching!** Sometimes, as we struggle to grow into this world, we have been made to feel like our sadness, our anxiety, our grief over what this world is and isn't, is a spiritual problem. We've been told that a stronger faith would mean fewer tears. And to those of us who've carried more years and more losses than we sometimes can say out loud, you don't have to pretend that you've arrived at peace about everything.

The Psalmist wept streams, not a trickle, but *streams*, and that made it into the canon, didn't edit that out. It put it right there in the hymnbook of Israel. Some grief just rides with us. Healing doesn't always mean the tears stop. Sometimes healing means we finally stop being ashamed of the tears.

The Pearl, the Treasure, and the Net

Back to Matthew. Verse 46, where a merchant finds one pearl of great price and sells everything he has to get it. Real healing, real growth, is going to cost us something. It might cost us an old certainty we've held onto more for comfort than for truth.

Then verse 47 tells us of a net thrown into the sea, gathering fish of every kind, and then the sorting happens.

Some of us hear "sorting" and think condemnation. That's not what I'm preaching in this verse today. **Healing includes sorting.** Growing in faith, sorting through an emerging faith instead of just inheriting it, growing into a faith wide enough to hold mystery and people who see it differently than we do. All this means some things get released along the way ... they get sorted out. Not everything we were taught was wrong. But not everything has to keep riding with us either.

And then in verse 52 Jesus says that every scribe trained for the kingdom is like a homeowner who brings out of the storeroom treasures new and old. **New and old. Not new instead of old.** The new questions, the new ways of seeing, perhaps the discomfort with how things have always been done... that is treasure. Jesus said so.

And what was carried faithfully through long seasons, through rooms and years some of us never had to survive; that is treasure too. Jesus said that also.

We are not two camps under one roof, arguing over whose treasure is real. We are one household, being trained for the kingdom, and the kingdom needs both chests open at once... the old and the new.

Nothing Can Separate Us

Let me close us out in Romans. Paul says the Spirit helps us in our weakness, because we don't even know what to pray for as we ought, and the Spirit intercedes for us with groans too deep for words.

On the days we don't have the words, **the Spirit is praying underneath our silence.** We are not required to have it figured out for God to be at work in us.

Then Paul builds; verse 35, “who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Hardship, distress, persecution ... NO.” Verse 38 “not death, not life, not angels, not rulers, not things present, not things to come, not anything else in all creation.”

Our healing was never resting on whether we healed fast enough, or asked the right questions in the right order, or kept every piece of the faith we were handed without changing a thing about it. Our healing rests in a love that has already decided it will not let us go.

Closing

So here's what I want to leave with you today.

If you have questions that feel too insignificantly small or just too weird to ask anyone you know, the Kingdom is like a mustard seed. Everything that is planted, even though as small and weird, like a mustard seed... grows.

If the faith you built your life on doesn't quite fit the way it used to, ask for a discerning heart, like Solomon. That's not doubt. That's wisdom.

If you're crying and don't know why the tears won't stop, the Psalmist wept streams too, and those tears made it into scripture to be medicine for healing.

If we're tired; tired of sorting, tired of growing, tired of holding new and old treasure at the same time, the Spirit, unbeknownst to us, is groaning with us right now, as if groaning is just normal.

And nothing is going to separate us from the love that's already healing us, seed by seed, tear by tear, treasure by treasure.

We are still becoming. And we are becoming healed, even when we can't feel it moving.

Let the church say amen.