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Chapter 13 in the Gospel of Matthew is basically one long teaching on the nature of the kingdom of God.

The writer strings together five slightly puzzling parables—about farming, about fishing, about seeking, about finding—and has Jesus say of all of them: “The kingdom of heaven is like this.” And after all of this (at the end of a very long day, I might add) he has Jesus ask the disciples the 64 thousand dollar question: “Have you understood all this?” To which they answer, “Yup.” Hah!

And then I love what happens next: the whole episode ends with Jesus saying, in essence, “Okey-dokey then. I’ve tried; I’ve done my best. You’ve either been listening or you haven’t. You’re on your own.”

This may sound mean, but it’s not, really; the evangelist is telling his audience, telling us, that the message is ours to carry, ours to interpret, and that this is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. We hear the stories of God’s mighty acts down through history, from creation right on down to the present day, and if we have ears to hear, that is hearts that are open and aware, we will understand how much God loves us and all creation, and we will be moved to tell others, to share that good news.

Every time we say the Lord’s prayer we pray for the coming of the kingdom. But do we really understand what that means? The parables of Matthew tell us that the kingdom life is for everyone; that kingdom life does not discriminate; that kingdom life does not judge; that kingdom life will prevail against all evil; that kingdom life is the ultimate source of fulfillment and joy. They also tell us that the realization of the kingdom is mysterious because it works on God’s timetable and to God’s purpose, not ours.

Our purpose is simply to tell others, pulling out the old stories, adding to them new ones in the shape of our own lives, becoming parables in our own right. When we feel too weak for the task all we have to do is pray. The Spirit will help us and all will work to the good. This is the purpose to which we are called: The kingdom of heaven is like...Audrey...*names*

You may be the only gospel someone ever reads.

This sermon was written by The Rev. Theo Park and delivered at Christ Episcopal Church, Red Wing. Fr. Theo thanks all those whose material he has borrowed and apologizes to those he has overlooked.