

NORTH BALWYN UNITING CHURCH

SUNDAY 24 JULY 2011

Tony Lai, Candidate for Ministry

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

“What do you Treasure?”

First of all, I want to thank Anneke and you for allowing me to join this church family. Before I came to North Balwyn, I had a good look at the information about the church and its people, but no matter how I tried to imagine and how much knowledge I have about this church, it is only through interaction and contribution can I know and get a real feel for it.

I am sure that this will be a refreshing experience for me and my family.

Today's scripture was taken from Matthew's writing. Here, Matthew put several parables together to elucidate the spiritual truth about the Kingdom of heaven, and we are going to look at five of them this morning.

For me, I found there is a sense of encouragement when I read this. I believe Matthew wants to bring the understanding of his readers about discipleship and the kingdom of heaven to a higher level.

We can see a three fold uplifting from the scriptures we read today.

First of all, there are the parables of mustard seed and the yeast. Both of them tells us the same thing, that is, 'the Kingdom of heaven is far bigger than we imagine'. It starts small, mustard seed is a tiny little inconspicuous thing, but when it is fully grown, even birds can rest in it, and it can become a blessing to the others.

Likewise, yeast are small, like powder, but its effect on the dough is clear, it affects the whole bread.

The Kingdom of heaven looks small and inconspicuous, but it is already there and will flourish to its full size. It will cover the whole universe and all faithful people can come to dwell in it like birds dwelling in the leaves of the mustard plant. God can turn something powerless into a great thing.

Do not think that what's happening to this church today is small or useless. We may feel that we are too small and powerless, but we have to understand that the great power of God who turn our works to become a blessing of the community. There is a saying which says, 'just try your best, and God will do the rest.'

So, with that in mind, 'How should we treasure it?'

After this two parables, Matthew puts the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, and he says that Jesus was speaking to his disciples exclusively in a separate room. Like us, I would think that most of them must already have had some knowledge of the Kingdom of heaven. But knowing is one thing, how we value it is another.

Here, Jesus tries to speak to the heart of the disciples, and challenges them by raising the questions: What would you do if you found a treasure in a field?

What would you do if you found a pearl of great price you've been looking for?'

These are really practical analogies, even to us today. Everyone wants to find some treasure in their backyard, or they would like to buy some extraordinary pearls on their overseas trips.

Jesus said, if anybody found something which is valuable to him or her, they will try their best to keep it or to obtain it. They may even sell some of their properties in order to get hold of it. The Kingdom of Heaven is like that treasure or that pearl of great price. It is something to look for, to strive towards and once you found it, to try and keep hold of it in every way you can.

Recently, I watched a SBS program called *The freedom rider*. A group of black Americans wanted to challenge the racial segregation law of their time in the 1960s. The first Freedom Ride began on May 4, 1961. 13 riders, seven black and six white, left Washington, D.C. on Greyhound and Trailways buses. Many were in their 40s and 50s.

Their plan was to ride through different states ending with a rally in New Orleans. They realized that this is going to be a dangerous trip as they were going to pass through a lot of places with racial discrimination. On their trips, many of them were beaten, a bus was burnt, people tortured and so on. A lot of them were jailed for breaking the state law. Finally they have almost filled up the jails.

After the first ride, even more and more people joined in. Some of them said in the documentary, "*I know it is hard, but I don't want my children to experience what we are experiencing today.*" For them, they started small, but they knew that bigger things were coming. In the end, their message was recognized, just a few loving hearts and brave people made the nation turn a new page in the 1960s. The segregation law was abolished.

Just like yeast has risen the dough and turn it into good tasting bread, these people had believed there was hidden treasure in their future.

Have you ever asked 'What treasure have I found today in my life?' Tell you what, we have found faith, a faith that supports us, a faith that guides us, a faith that can give us eternal life and lead us to the Kingdom of God.

We have also found the church where we now worshipping, a minister, a choir, a fellowship. We need to treasure these things, because they are gifts from God. If we treasure them, our blessings will flourish, but we need to put energy into it, even make sacrifices.

So, let us recap. The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast tell us that the power of God will flourish from a single spark. The parables of the hidden treasure and the fine pearl asked the disciples to treasure the Kingdom of Heaven and hold on to it at all cost.

Let us come to the last parable, the parable of the net.

The parable of the net depicts the kingdom spreading throughout the world. It says, the Kingdom of Heaven is like the fisherman who's net catches many kinds of fish, he will collect the good fish when the time comes and throw out the bad. Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven is free to all but not without obligation.

We know that all faithful people are good fish, but you got to do something. Jesus said a teacher of the law, who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven, is like the owner of a house, who

brings more treasures to the world.

Sharing is the commandment given by Jesus. For us, this means that today, it is a blessing for us to worship in a safe and comfortable place like this, but, that is not the end of it. Jesus expects us to bring out and share with those who are still looking for that treasure or that pearl.

That's why I see these scriptures as an encouraging message from Jesus, it pushes our faith forward.

The seed, the yeast tells us the potential of our faith.

The treasure and the pearl tells us of the value of our faith.

The net tells us of the obligation of our faith.

The storeroom tells us of the wealth of the faith we have to share.

As seekers of faith, we are looking for the seed and yeast which carries the potential of God's growing power inside us.

As followers, we are intended to give what we have for the treasure offers us by God in faith.

As disciples, we are called to bear responsibilities and sharing mission with someone who still don't aware of this treasure yet.

It is not a matter of nationality, not a matter of health and strength, Because as with the mustard seed or with the yeast, a single word of encouragement and kindness, a single word of prayer can flourish into an open arm that gives shelter to many people.

Pray that we all understand this message and have the courage to act on it.

Amen.