

## **Views from the Pews - More parables of the Kingdom**

Today's readings from Matthew add more short parables, each beginning with the words, "The kingdom of heaven is like....". As before, Jesus bases all his analogies on scenes easily visualised by his hearers, so he talks about the remarkable generative powers of small mustard seeds and of tiny particles of yeast, and about the joy of finding a hidden treasure, or a net full of fish. All the synoptic gospels repeat the parable of the mustard seed, and Luke adds the one about the yeast, but the rest appear only in Matthew. There, he ends by asking them, "Have you understood all this?", and they answer "Yes"; but it's a fair bet they did not then, any more than most of us do now.

We do at least have one advantage, they didn't have: Robert Farrar Capon's analysis in *The Parables of the Kingdom*. First, Capon notes that the kingdom is itself what is sown, not the result of that sowing, and the small size of the seeds does not prevent them from growing into large plants covering the whole field. Likewise, small quantities of yeast can leaven a whole loaf. Both images represent the mystery of the hidden workings of God's Spirit in nature, which go on without any help from us. Second, Jesus is talking about large scale operations here – the field stands for the whole world, and three measures of flour (128 cups) plus 42 cups of water make a hundred pounds' weight of dough. Moreover, the dough rises because it contains tiny pockets of carbon dioxide which expand as they are heated – a profound image of how the hidden warm, active breath of God supports life throughout creation.

The next two parables continue the theme of the kingdom of God as a hidden mystery of supreme value. The man who found the treasure sold everything he had to buy the whole field (weeds, rats and all, so not just the bit where he re-buried it), and he stands for the universal church. Now, as 'owners' of the supreme mystery of grace, the church's job is to spread its net to pass that message on to all sorts and conditions of people. All of them are its care until "the end of the age [when the] angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous". God does not judge them before that, and neither should we.

*Kim King*