

July 30, 2017

“Worth Giving Up All We Have”
Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46

We hear again this morning about God’s Reign, or Kingdom of Heaven. Today we hear it in four short parables.

The first is the mustard seed. It may not be the smallest seed on the earth, but one of the smallest. When it is planted, it grows to become a big bush where birds may come, make their nests and raise their families.

The second is yeast in bread. God’s Reign is like a tiny bit of yeast mixed with wheat. The yeast is the leavening that causes the wheat to rise and become bread.

Both parables, a mustard seed and yeast, express the **growth**, expansion and fruitfulness of God’s Reign. Both speak to the **power** of the mustard seed and yeast despite their small size. They are **alive**, and power is within them. We do not know *exactly* how the seed grows to become a big bush or how the yeast transforms wheat into the loaf of bread we eat. It’s the power *within* the seed and yeast that make the plant grow and bread rise.

The seed and yeast are **effective** and **strong**. A tiny mustard seed grows to be a tall and strong bush to hold birds’ nests. A little bit of yeast raises “a bushel of wheat.” A bushel of wheat is more than 70 pounds of wheat, in our measurements, which would be enough to feed over 100 people.

The third parable of God’s Reign is a treasure hidden in a field. Someone finds it, puts it back in the field, sells everything he owns, may even go out and borrow, and purchase the field. The treasure is worth losing everything else.

The fourth parable is a precious pearl a merchant has found. When she finds the finest of pearls, she goes out and sells all she owns, including all the pearls she owns, to buy that pearl of all pearls.

The parables of a treasure in a field and the finest pearl speak to the **value**, **preciousness** of God’s Reign, what God offers to us. Both the treasure and the pearl were worth giving up all they had.

Some people sell or lose all they have for something that is not valuable. Those who are sadly addicted to gambling sell or use all they possess to bid on a feeble dream ...and they lose all.
PERIOD.

Some people may lose all they have to get the feeling of “high.” Those who are sadly addicted to drugs may lose everything for getting “high.”

Three from this congregation and I attended a meeting of LI-CAN, Long Island Congregations, Associations & Neighborhoods hosted by Long Island East District of our church, held at Bayport UMC this past Wednesday night. The meeting was in response to the opioid epidemic in our neighborhoods.

After the meeting earlier this year, on April 26, that drew more than 1,000 people to St. Anthony's High School in Huntington to discuss the severity of Opioid epidemic, a group of high school students started the myhigh social media campaign. Using Instagram, Twitter, facebook and myhigh.org website, they posted (anyone can post on these sites) a video or picture of how they get "high" without using drugs.

A girl posted her picture and wrote, "Myhigh is Mock Trial because I enjoy the thrill and rush of Mock Trial. I enjoy being presented with difficult tasks in situations and working with a team to come up with a solution. "

A boy wrote, "Myhigh is basketball because I enjoy the rush of running back and forth on the court and when the score is close. I love the feeling when I play my best and my teammates and my coach are proud of me"

Another girl wrote, "Myhigh is drawing because it relaxes me and distracts me from all the stress of school. "

What is your "high"? What will make you "high"? Would anyone like to share?

Let me share "Myhigh," Myhighs are Aquafitness class, swimming, Yoga, strength training, walking, cooking and baking on my day-off and a feeling of accomplishment after my laundry is done, getting ready for the week ahead.

In addition to those "highs," I have a quiet "Myhigh." Someone gifted me this book, *Jesus Calling*, devotions for every day of the year, and I've been reading it since January 1 this year. It is written as if Jesus is speaking directly to us, based on the Scriptures. From February on, my highlighting on pages became VERY frequent. Close to a half way through, I finally got it, the message of God's calling.

Though the words for each day are different, the message underneath is the same every day. It's the message that leads us to the ultimate happiness or "high" - the peace that passes all human understanding. It is the treasure that stays with us even after we lose all. It's the precious pearl that cannot be compared with any other. It's the most powerful and effective message, based on the living word of God, which makes us rise and grow tall even to the point of embracing others. It leads us the reign of God where the ultimate high that will never go away permeates.

The first part of the message is **trust** - trust in God. Facing fear, unknown, worries, stresses of life or everyday life, trust in God, who holds our future, who has given Jesus to us and who loves us no

matter what. Each of us counts before God. God desires the best for us. Don't take on the worries of tomorrow. God gives us strength just enough to deal with each day. "I am with you always."

The second part of the message is deeply connected to the first one. **Be thankful.** Count your blessings. Focus on what you DO have and not on what you DON'T have.

As Susumu shared in his testimony and message a couple of weeks ago, it has been a very tough and challenging year for my family. When I am discouraged or feel sad, I count God's blessings *for today*. I can be with my loved ones today. I can do this, I have... whatever that might be, seen or unseen. Being thankful for what I can do and what I have brings me to a thankful heart. Being aware of those who do not have what I have or those who cannot do what I can leads me to be grateful to God and allows me to extend God's kindness to others.

Kingdom of God, God's Reign is near and among us. It is precious; and nothing and nobody can take it away from us. We don't need to purchase it. It is given to us free through Jesus . Let us grow in it and share it with others. Amen.