

## **Hidden and Mixed In**

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### **Genesis 29:15-28**

<sup>15</sup> Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?” <sup>16</sup> Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. <sup>17</sup> Leah’s eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. <sup>18</sup> Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” <sup>19</sup> Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.” <sup>20</sup> So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

<sup>21</sup> Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.” <sup>22</sup> So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast.

<sup>23</sup> But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. <sup>24</sup> (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) <sup>25</sup> When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?” <sup>26</sup> Laban said, “This is not done in our country — giving the younger before the firstborn. <sup>27</sup> Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” <sup>28</sup> Jacob did so and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

### **Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

<sup>31</sup> He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field;

<sup>32</sup> *it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”*

<sup>33</sup> *He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”...*

<sup>44</sup> *“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

<sup>45</sup> *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; <sup>46</sup> on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

<sup>47</sup> *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; <sup>48</sup> when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. <sup>49</sup> So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

<sup>51</sup> *“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” <sup>52</sup> And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”*

Things go missing:

- Your phone, even though it's in your hand and you are on a call with someone and you just panicked and asked them where your phone is because you felt your empty pocket
- Your glasses which are “lost” right where you left them, on top of your head
- Your keys, and when you find them you are certain you looked there multiple times!

We do this all the time! I do this all the time. Each of those citations has happened to me. It drives my husband nuts because multiple times a day I have to ask him where I left something. AND yet, when he misplaces something, I can find it with scary accuracy. He once couldn't find his sunglasses and I was able to say "they're on the end table, to the left of the couch, under a sheet of paper." AND they were.

Each of these items are relatively easy to find. Generally, they stick out, they don't match their surroundings. But what about when they do match? What about when things are hidden and mixed in? How do we find things then?

The answer is "by looking for the evidence of their presence." Our passage today talked of a merchant looking for the best pearls, fisher persons looking for the good fish, and yeast mixed into flour. Each of these talk of things hidden and mixed in. To find a good fish or the best pearl, you must look carefully at the qualities and characteristics of lots of fish and pearls. You must find evidence of good qualities and characteristics among many others that have poor or bad ones. And how do you know if you remembered to add yeast? If the dough begins to rise, when you see the evidence of its presence, you know you added the yeast.

Our Gospel lesson today focuses on this treasure of incalculable value that is in plain sight, all around us, in places not expected and even right under our noses. Yet, with it being right there, we miss it. We don't know how to find it, we don't know what to look for, but Jesus does! And Jesus is teaching how to seek and find this treasure in these passages. But how he is going about this seems really odd to many of us. He's telling a lot of little stories, little similes, saying one thing is like another, in this case saying the kingdom of God, or God's new creation as I like to say, is like something we are more familiar with.

But these stories all seem to be disconnected. It's exhausting to try to understand, difficult because sometimes we might feel the ideas contradict, maybe Jesus is just messing with us? Maybe we can just skip over this part? It's like if the disciples asked, "Jesus, is the kingdom of heaven like A or like B?" and Jesus simply said "Yes" with a smile on his face. How is that helpful to us? And then Jesus asks if the disciples understand what he is saying and they say, "yes"! Really? Because I'm not sure anyone truly gets it at this point. We know the disciples struggled understanding Jesus at times.

The way that Jesus is teaching here is called "charuz." It means "stringing pearls" and it is basically giving lots of little examples. Jesus, and other rabbi's or teachers of the time, would give lots of little pictures, little stories, to show or explain something from many perspectives or to look at lots of small details of something. This style can help make you think. It can make you work for the answer or idea, to mull it over and to keep it in your mind.

So what exactly are we supposed to be thinking about, mulling over in our minds? When you lose your keys, because we all do it sometime, do you find them by constantly looking in the same places or in the same ways? Maybe sometimes it works, but usually not. You have to have where and how you look so you can come across them in that unexpected place you left them.

It's the same with God's new creation, we have to look for it differently. It's tempting to get frustrated with difficult answers like the ones Jesus gives here. What he is saying makes it sound a bit hard to do; Giving up everything to attain this treasure (pearl, treasure in the field), putting a lot of work into finding things hidden and mixed in that are hard to spot (yeast, fish). It isn't easy.

It's hard to embrace this challenge, the search itself, with the same passion that we reserve for the end goal, for the thing we are looking for.

But that passion is important to hold onto during the entire process! Because that treasure of incalculable value, the new creation, isn't just something nebulous, untouchable, or just out there in the future. If we look carefully, if we change how we look for that treasure, we *will* find what we are looking for. We will find God's new creation all around us, in unexpected, ordinary places and ways. God is working now! God is creating now! God's kingdom, God's kin-dom, God's new creation is all around us now, in hidden and in obvious ways just as Jesus is describing.

You might be asking, "What about our other passage today? When does that come into play?" Right now. That passage doesn't seem like it reflects God's new creation, does it? The story we read doesn't list much, it just gives a very clinical description of the events, but we know what this story and the rest of Jacob, Leah and Rachel's stories hold: they are messy, filled with pain, jealousy, love, and deception. Can God's new creation truly be found there?

YES IT CAN! Even here, even in the hard and difficult moments of life. The pain is not negated. The presence of God and God's work does not erase the hurt and mess of this story, of your story. These are still valid painful emotions in reaction to hurtful actions. But our pain, both what we cause and what we feel, *does not* block God from working and fulfilling God's new creation.

There is still work to be done, work that we must participate in, to heal and raise each other up. But if we learn to search differently, we can learn to find God's new creation everywhere!

In the coming days, I want to ask you to think about how God might be challenging you to change how you seek out and look for God's new creation. If you aren't sure where to start, I have found it helpful to ask myself the question backwards: where do I find it hardest to find evidence of God's new creation? Is it when I look at the homeless community around me? The divisions in society? The hunger or family strife so many struggle with? Look around you this week, look inside you this week. Are you looking for God's work around you? Are you finding it? Do you need to change how you are seeking it? Let us all strive to seek God's new creation, God's kingdom, God's kin-dom, together, like the invaluable treasure it is.

Amen.