

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

By the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, Founder of Crossways International
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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Year A - Proper 12, Text: Matthew 13:44-52

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Verses 13:31–32: The message of the parables of the mustard seed and of the yeast is similar. It has to do with the contrast between the small beginnings of God's Kingdom and its marvelous growth and expansion. When pondering 13:32, note the contents of Daniel 4:7–9 and 17–19, where the birds nesting in the tree represent the people of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. Note also Ezekiel 17:23 and 31:6.

Verse 13:33: Apart from this parable and the reference in 16:12, the term *yeast* or *leaven* is usually used a symbol of corruption (note Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; 1 Corinthians 5:6–8; Galatians 5:9). Not so here; the disciples are meant to “infect” the world with the gospel! The “three measures” referred to is an enormous amount — enough to feed 100 people. Most likely the exaggeration of this element of the parable points to the greatness of the effect of Jesus' kingdom.

Verses 13:44–46: The first two of the final three parables in this chapter make the same point. The person who finds a buried treasure and the merchant who, while searching for fine pearls, finds one of great value, sell all that they have to purchase what they have found.

On one hand, this image aptly describes the gracious and loving act of Christ himself in giving up his life for the sake of those he seeks and finds. The joy with which the purchaser does this is made explicit in the first parable, but may be presumed to apply to the second parable as well. Jesus act for our sake is one of that stems from his great love for us! (1 John 3:1).

This same image could also be used to show that the one who “finds” the supreme value of God's kingdom gives up whatever he has to obtain it. Note: The reference to a treasure being buried (and hidden!) in a field reflects a practice common in the unsettled social conditions that prevailed in the Palestine of Jesus' day.

The message is that Jesus' hearers should likewise act with boldness when they discover the treasure of

God's Kingdom. They should reorder their lives (i.e. repent, 4:17) with joyous and dramatic abandon and then live under God with single-minded devotion (cf. 5:48).

Verses 13:47–50: The concluding parable of the fishnet resembles the explanation of the parable of the weeds with its stress upon the final exclusion of evil persons from God's Kingdom. (Here, note verse 49-50 in particular.)

These two parables stand like a pair of bookends embracing the two short parables of joyous finding (vv. 44–46). These two intermediate parables (treasure and pearl) focus on people gladly sacrificing anything in order to possess the prize of God's Kingdom. They are celebrations of decisive, radical actions.

But the bracketing parables (weeds and net) are stern warnings. Those who fail to seize the treasure and possess it will finally experience not eternal joy but endless sorrow. Whatever they have will be taken away. The bracketing parables speak the language of good and evil, of righteousness and lawlessness. They declare that the joy of possession is the beginning and not the end of the matter. Those who possess eternal joy are called to a profound responsibility this side of their Eternal Home.

Verses 13:51–52: These verses apply to the Twelve and their successors. The scribe trained for the Kingdom of Heaven (i.e., the Kingdom of God) knows both the teaching of Jesus (the new) and that of the Law and the Prophets (the old). He provides in his own teaching both the new and the old as interpreted and fulfilled by the new.

