

St Matthew's gospel, apart from the infancy at the beginning and the passion – resurrection at the end, is essentially made up of five discourses of Jesus. Five times we have extended passages where the Lord speaks and teaches, mirroring the five books of the Jewish law.

Today's gospel passage comes right from the middle of the third discourse – the very centre, of Jesus' teaching. This discourse contains seven parables about the kingdom of heaven; the parable of the sower we heard last week, three we hear today, and three we will hear next Sunday. Today's parables all start with a reference to the kingdom: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed..."; "the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard..."; "the kingdom of heaven is like leaven...".

Obviously, the kingdom of heaven is important to Jesus. It was the first thing he preached in his ministry: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

So what is the kingdom of heaven?

Actually, that's the wrong question. The first of today's parables tells us "the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a *man* who sowed good seed" – not to the seed, nor to the field where it is sown, but to the *man* who sows it. So the question is rather "*Who* is the kingdom of heaven?" and the answer is: Jesus of Nazareth, the one whom Peter will later describe as "the Christ, the Son of the living God". When Christ says: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" he's effectively saying, "Repent – for I am here!"

The coming of Christ signals a new nation, a new people of God, a new reign. And returning to the parables we can perhaps now better understand that reign.

When Christ says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed" he is saying, "I am like a grain of mustard seed. I – who am greater than anything of which you could conceive – have humbled myself and made myself tiny; but

from that tiny seed, that tiny human being, the greatness of God will be revealed.”

And when Christ says, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven” he is saying, “I am like yeast hidden in the meal. I am present throughout the whole of creation, often unseen and unnoticed, but quietly working to transform the universe. Indeed, I will raise up all creation.”

And the parable of the weeds among the wheat Christ tells us, “I am the one who sows what is good in the world, and I will not allow that good to be destroyed by evil and corruption. You whom I have sown will not be cut down for the sake of the evil in the world, but I will gather you to myself at the close of the age.”

“I am the God of whom the book of Wisdom speaks, who cares for everything, who is merciful and mild in judgement, who grants the grace of repentance to those who sin, but who in my supreme strength will see justice done.”

This is Jesus Christ, the kingdom of heaven, who is proclaimed by the gospels and whom we are called to follow. An insofar as we are other Christs – for we have been incorporated into Him by Baptism – we too are the Kingdom of Heaven. This should give us great peace, great consolation. As St Paul puts it in his Second Letter to Timothy, “We may be unfaithful, but he is always faithful, for he cannot disown his own self.”