

## ***Small and Hidden***

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Before we get into the parables set before us this evening – let's talk about why Jesus uses parables in the first place. The short answer is – faith. As our first reading teaches us – parables both reveal, and hide.

To faith, parables reveal the Kingdom of God – that is – what God is doing, how He is at work. And so, through parables – to faith, more is given, an abundance. Jesus is giving faith more to hold on to – more to be strengthened by – giving us certainty, and hope, and even courage.

But as our first reading also teaches us – to unbelief, parables hide the Kingdom of God. To hearts grown dull (calloused to the hearing of God's Word) – ears that are hard of hearing – those who have closed their eyes --- what God is doing remains hidden, not understood, and not believed.

The unbeliever hears the parables of Jesus and thinks that the Kingdom of God is foolish, silly, impotent – a nothing.

The parables tonight – where Jesus throws two or more things alongside each other for the sake of comparison, to both reveal and hide the Kingdom of God --- they are short and sweet. And in both, the Kingdom of God looks small – and how God is at work is hidden. So tonight, we deal with the small and the hidden.

Another side-note before we proceed – giving you a little insight into my catechetical approach. When we study the Sacrament of Holy Baptism – I begin in the Old Testament (which might seem strange, since Christ institutes baptism in the New Testament). And I begin by asking – can you think of any Old Testament “water stories”?

Well, “in the beginning,” at Creation the Holy Spirit is hovering over the face of the waters. There’s the Flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, Jonah and the whale, water from the rock, crossing the Jordan River to enter into the Promised Land. And there are others, but we begin by studying the cleansing of Naaman the leper.

With all of these “water stories” we see how God works through means – through simple water. For Naaman, washing in the water seven times seems like a small thing – a hidden thing – and at first, he rejects it. What God has promised seems like a waste of time. But the Lord is faithful. He does what He promises. And His promise creates a faith in Naaman, by which he is cleansed.

So also, with the Lord’s Supper – instituted by Christ in the New Testament – but we begin our catechesis in the Old Testament. Can you think of any Old Testament “food, or eating stories”?

There’s the Garden of Eden and the forbidden fruit – the Manna from heaven – the Passover Lamb – and the eating of some of the sacrifices offered at the Temple.

Again, we see how God works through means – simple means, common means – like bread, and wine. Again, what God is doing is hidden. That’s why the catechism asks questions like: How can water do such great things? How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?

“The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.” A grain of mustard seed and the kingdom of heaven – thrown alongside each other, for the sake of comparison.

This smallest of grains GROWS! Something actually happens! God is doing something! The “kingdom of heaven” is ACTIVE – God at work! That smallest grain of seed grows and becomes larger – it grows into a tree – where the birds of the air come to nest and rest.

“The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.” The kingdom is hidden – but it’s ACTIVE, something is going on – and you can see the results of the work – as the yeast works through the whole lump of flour and the dough rises!

Let me ask you a catechetical question. Can you think of any “small and hidden stories” in the Bible?

“In the beginning” all things were created simply by the spoken Word of God. How can a spoken Word do such great things? All things in heaven and on earth – created out of nothing – simply by means of a Word from the mouth of God.

Small and hidden. Adam and Eve – one man and one woman – but she is the “mother of all living.” From these two comes all of mankind. God’s powerful command to “be fruitful and multiply” – still bearing fruit today – with your birth, and the birth of all the descendants of Adam and Eve. God at work. Small and hidden.

How about Noah and his family – a small congregation of God’s people, hidden away in an ark. And speaking of arks – what about baby Moses and his ark (his basket is an “ark”). Again, God at work – small and hidden – to rescue – not only Moses, but through Moses all of Israel – and through Israel, all mankind through the promised Savior.

Moses’ staff – a stick – changing the water of the Nile into blood – parting the Red Sea, and so on.

The walls of the fortified city of Jericho – falling flat because Israel walked around her perimeter, blew a trumpet and shouted. The enemy defeated. The enemy conquered. How can walking and a trumpet and shouting do such great things? God at work – small and hidden.

Even the nation of Israel itself – not a superpower on the world’s stage – but the chosen instrument through which God promised to be at work. The tribe of Judah (from which the Savior comes), is the least of the tribes. God is often working through the least, the smallest, the hidden – the older son serving the younger – the little boy David defeating the giant Goliath, and so on.

Dearly beloved, Jesus speaks these parables into your ears today so that you might know what He is doing – how He is ruling over all of Creation – and how He is ruling over your life. He reveals what is hidden to eyes and senses – so that your faith has something to hold onto.

In small and hidden words, water, bread and wine – God at work to create and sustain a faith that trusts in Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness, life and salvation. Through small and hidden means – God at work creating and sustaining His Church – like a tree in which you might nest and find rest.

God is at work through those humble, common, repeated every week, means of His grace – through His Word and Sacrament, which are the means by which the Holy Spirit is at work. God at work for you, and through you – for your salvation, and for the salvation of your fellow man.

God grant you ears to hear His Word – the eyes of faith to see how He is at work in your life daily – and a heart that rejoices in His gracious forgiveness, and the life of faith and freedom lived under Him in His kingdom.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.