



# Sunday Reflection

## 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 26 July 2020

# Pentecost 8

while all Church worship in the buildings is suspended

On this 8th Sunday after Pentecost, and the seventh Sunday after Trinity, through our worship today may we discern how the gifts that God has given us, as individuals and as a community, are to be brought into the open and used in the ongoing task of building Christ's kingdom.

## Reflection for this week's Gospel

**“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.”** Matthew 13:33

### An Illustration to set the scene

Many gardeners encourage red mason bees into their gardens as important pollinators. These solitary bees are attracted to containers filled with short lengths of hollow bamboo sticks, sealed at the far



end. A female bee crawls inside the bamboo, carrying a tiny quantity of mud. Slowly she makes a small mud-lined chamber, lays an egg, adds a larder of pollen, closes the chamber with more mud, then builds the next and the next, proceeding back down the stick, until she reaches the entrance, which she seals tight. Hidden away in the dark her eggs will hatch and the larvae

will feed, grow and eventually develop into a fresh generation of adult bees. However, she knows that predators, such as parasitic wasps and woodpeckers, may pierce the seal to devour her progeny. Hence, she lays her most precious eggs, the female ones, in the safest place in the chambers, furthest away from the entrance.



### **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

Just as solitary bees bury their eggs so that they might be fruitful, each of today's parables revolves around things hidden: a mustard seed that requires sowing to germinate; yeast that is mixed ("hid" in some translations) to be effective; buried treasure; a pearl that must be searched for; fish trawled from the depths of the sea. Out of the tiny, the insignificant, the hidden, the kingdom of heaven blossoms.

There is a surfeit of abundance in this blossoming. The mustard seed, which at best grows to an annual bush nine feet high, is transformed into a mighty tree, reminiscent of that described by Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4, which shelters all the birds of the air. The yeast is added to three measures of flour – the same volume that Sarah uses to provide for the three heavenly visitors in Genesis 18 – which produces enough bread to feed a small village. The hidden treasure and the great pearl are worth everything that their finders possess, and the net thrown into the sea catches fish of every kind.

More than that, the kingdom is derived from ordinary people's daily toil – farming, home-making, commerce, fishing – not the actions of political, military or religious powerbrokers. It is not a

kingdom of borders but of shelter – all the birds of the air are welcome in its branches; fish of every kind are caught in its net. It offers abundant food to every resident. The parables of the hidden treasure and the great pearl link back to Solomon in Genesis – the kingdom also values wisdom over riches and earthly power. But there is an important corollary in the parable of the net, which reinforces the message of the parable of the weeds earlier in this chapter. Not everyone accepts God's kingdom offer, shares its values or lives by its precepts.

### **How can we reflect on the application to our lives?**

The red mason bee works hard to protect her buried eggs. On reaching maturity, her progeny strive to reach the light. Their most important work, requiring determination and the right instinct, takes place hidden from sight.

There is a tendency to view these parables as images of the Church working its purposes out, developing from small seed to massive tree. But they aren't about the Church; they are parables of the kingdom. It is not a treasure to be acquired or something that an individual can exclusively possess. Rather, it is a gracious gift from God, a way of being, ongoing and eternal, into which we are offered the opportunity to enter, freely, wholeheartedly and with total commitment. This kingdom is less like a physical nation and more akin to Solomon's wisdom – God's gift of knowledge that, if used well, protects, shelters, nurtures and feeds all people, not just one individual.

Many of us have to work hard to discover seeds of the kingdom buried deep in our own heart, and we need to commit all our energy and focus to nurturing them in order that they can blossom with abundance when the cares of the world threaten to squeeze them dry. But we must also remember that God is eternally doing kingdom work in the life of each of us.

Sometimes the smallest, least-noticed gestures of kindness and selflessness provide the richest soil for God's kingdom to grow and flourish.

**“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.”** Matthew 13:33

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God's spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

**[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)**