

This morning's gospel concludes a lengthy section of Jesus' teaching which started with the sower of the seed, continued with the weeds sown among the wheat and concludes today with these four comparisons. Jesus is teaching about the reign of God. In each case, it is something very small. A seed, yeast, a treasure hidden in a field, a pearl. When we hear these images we tend to focus on the big bit – the tree of mustard that Jesus describes, the way the yeast will work through the flour, the big passion that caused the men to sell everything to buy the field or the pearl. We think that bigger is better. But Jesus says the reign of God is something very small.

There is a similar focus in the Old Testament when God persistently calls those who are younger or in some way less important to lead the people. Israel itself was a small nation in comparison with its neighbors.

St Benedict's is a small church. The reign of God is here. The reign of God is very small; it is the mustard seed as well as the zillions of mustard plants that grow from that seed. It is also hidden. We heard that the reign of God is "is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." Three measures of flour was not three cups as we might use to make a loaf of bread but much more – three measures would make enough bread to feed 100 people – and the word Jesus used is not so much mix as hide. The woman hid yeast in about 60 pounds of flour. But that little bit of yeast was enough to leaven all the flour.

Jesus reminds us that the reign of God is not all light and love and peace. Among the good fish are bad fish. Even as we draw closer to God and experience more and more of the peace and joy of the kingdom, bad stuff continues to happen. It is only at the end of time that everything is sorted out. And it is not our place to judge the difference between the good and the bad... that is up to the angels of God.

Clearly the reign of God is small, is very powerful, generates great passion and is complicated.

Today's reading from Paul's letter to the Roman's is the expression of someone who is living in the small, hidden, growing, ginormous thing which is the reign of God. Paul's language is quite different from Jesus'. And so is his perspective. While Jesus is describing the reign from a distance, Paul is living it.

In this reign, Paul tells us, the Spirit herself is on our side, praying, rooting, cheerleading constantly for us - we are so completely loved by God that nothing, nothing can separate us from that love. Even though he says, "...we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered," still, all things work together for those who love God.

I think this is one of the challenges for us today, living as we do in peace and prosperity. We have been seduced into thinking that the reign of God is entirely a place of sweetness and love, and that when we are living in right relationship with God all will be well, not only with our souls, but also with our lives in this world. That's not the world Paul is describing. Paul's world is both/and. There is tremendous difficulty but even in the presence of the difficulty, God's love sustains us.

It's like the flour. Even in 60 pounds of flour, the yeast is working. Even in times of loss, the love of God is working. Or like the field; even when the field looks just like any other, there is hidden treasure. Hidden treasure that is enough to make one joyfully change one's life completely.

In God's love, God sent his Son so that we might have life and so that we too might by grace become the children of God, the brothers and sisters of Jesus the Christ. In God's love we are called to be part of one large family – God's family. If God's love was so great that God chose to become human, with all our limitations and difficulties, with all our failings and our lovableness, if God's love was that great then God's love will not fail us now.

That is what it's like to live in the reign of God.

It may be in its small stage or its big stage, it may be a seed or a tree, but we are invited into this amazing relationship with the living God, where God is like totally on our side. Those of us who are enrolled in the reign of God can know that even when life is difficult, God is still loving us and in the end all will work out. Not only has God called us, but he will also remake us in the image of his Son, the Christ and will bring us into the glory of his triumphant reign.

This is a wonderful and amazing thing.

But it doesn't always seem as though we are living in the reign. Sometimes it seems as though it has gone back to being hidden in the flour or buried in the ground and we haven't been given the treasure map. Sometimes we keep sifting through the pearls and they're all poor quality. Or everywhere we look we see bad fish.

When that happens, it takes a big shift for us to be able to see that the reign of God is still here. We need help to see the underlying reality. Perhaps that is why the Spirit is constantly helping us in our weakness, praying for us and with us, in us and through us. So that the eyes of our hearts will be opened and our faith will be strengthened. We cannot see the mustard seed buried in the ground which will one day become a huge plant. We cannot see the yeast working in the flour. But they are still there, they are still real. God's love is like that. It's still there, it's still real.

Even when we can't see it or feel it, the reign of God is here among us.

As Paul said, "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Amen