

Interactive lesson



picture from MMMS collection

Do you like to blow bubbles?

Does it take a lot of bubble soap to form a bubble?

What is a bubble mostly? What fills it?

Can you see the air being blown into a bubble?

Does a bubble last forever?

Do you like glimpses of God's kingdom on earth?

Does it take many people for glimpses of God's kingdom on earth to be possible?

What causes evidence of God's kingdom on earth?

Can we see God's love or the Holy Spirit directly?

Does evidence of God's love or the action of the Holy Spirit remain exactly as we saw it forever?

When I go to band concerts in the summertime, I like to blow bubbles while I listen to the music. This tends to attract small children who are fascinated by the bubbles and love to pop them. Do you know what I tell them about that?

"Pop all you want; I will blow more!" They just need to stay back so that I can get the bubbles formed and away from my face before they pop them, and to take turns/not fight over who gets to pop them. Sometimes I will teach them to "bubble juggle" - to blow the

bubbles upward again and again, so they last longer.

Do you think people are fascinated by acts of the Holy Spirit?

Do we ever do the equivalent of popping a sharing of God's love?

How do you think God responds when we "pop" one of those blessings?

I think many of us look for acts of God's love like children anticipating bubbles being blown for our enjoyment. We are fascinated by how beautiful it is, yet tend to poke at it, causing it to be disrupted. I think God smiles at our joy and provides more.

Sometimes we get angry or make others angry because we go after the same blessings. Sometimes we try to sustain the loveliness by passing on related acts of kindness.

Ultimately, it is important to remember that although unseen, God is the source of all good; we need to be patient while the Holy Spirit works and to share the resulting blessings in the love of Christ.

Gospel lesson

Again we continue from where we left off last week in the Gospel of Matthew, talking about sowing seeds.



picture from from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/chef-making-dough-for-cookies-in-bakery-6287300/>; picture credit: Klaus Nielsen

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

NRSV

³¹ He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field;

³² it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

³³ He told them another parable: "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."

⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls;

⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every

kind;

⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad.

⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous

⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes."

⁵² And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "More Precious than Silver">

TFWS #2065>

Message: Hidden & Mixed In



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-path-of-the-disciple-imagining-a-new-reality/ninth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/ninth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

God of mystery and unexpected results,
as we take time now to further consider today's
scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may learn how You would best use us to transform the world. Amen.

In Imagining a New Reality along the Path of the Disciple, today we consider what is “Hidden & Mixed In”.

“We prefer the obvious. We like to be sure. But faith is something else indeed. Hebrews 11:1 reminds us that faith “is the conviction of things not seen.” Not seen? Like a treasure hidden in a field, or like yeast mixed in the flour, hidden and mixed in. That’s how grace works.”



picture from MMMS collection

Most of you by now have probably heard me describe geocaching. It is sort of a technology-driven hide-and-seek or treasure hunt. Someone takes a watertight container, hides it off the beaten path, and posts the coordinates for it on the internet. Others can then look up the cache location and go looking for it. Upon finding a geocache, the seekers sign the logbook, possibly swap trinkets, and put the cache back to the way they found it.

Keven and I started geocaching shortly after the start of the millennium because the gps technology was becoming widely affordable and we like hiking in the woods. We discovered places we had never realized existed when going in search of geocaches - little parks here and there, a waterfall, undeveloped state land, various landmarks. Always we traveled with a specific destination in mind and then returned home.

Sometimes we would hike for hours just to find a geocache, considering it worth the effort to be able to log it as "found".

Perhaps ironically, the value for us in geocaching never lay in the physical items placed in the cache, though it was always extremely disappointing if we did not find the expected container. The real joy of geocaching came from seeing new places, enjoying nature, and having fun adventures together. It also serves as good exercise and a reason to get out of the house - especially nice during the pandemic.

These are benefits that are not obvious from the geocaching website or even within a geocache itself. I think the love of God is much like that - not necessarily obvious from the physical tasks we do, but very evident in the outcome when we focus on the kingdom of God.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/jacob-wedding/>

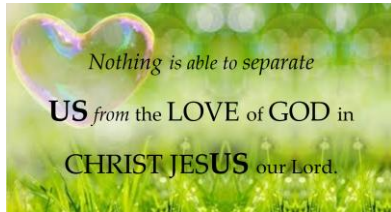
Throughout history, people have forgotten or denied the glory and love of God. We hear the psalmist reminding the people to give thanks and praise to God – we know God is worthy of it! We know that God blesses us abundantly!

Yet then we turn around and act like we know best, trying to get the better of one another. Laban had an agreement with Jacob that he could have Rachel as his wife after working seven years, but when the time rolled around, he tricked him. Did he really think through what kind of damage to family relationships and business dealings that could cause? Keep in mind that Jacob had left his home to go work for Laban because of his own trickery around Isaac's blessing.

It is no wonder God gave the Israelites commandments about how to live at Sinai with that family history of shenanigans. Instead of simply sharing love and the blessings that we have, people then (and today) cause chaos and make God work to be able to bless us. We diminish each other as individuals and as a society when we sin.

God's kingdom is so much better than the antics we create for ourselves. Jesus gave us a series of

parables today about how precious the kingdom of heaven is, to be sought after above all else. And unlike the “precious” that Gollum sought in the Lord of the Rings, the kingdom of heaven is good and available for all who seek God in love.



personal creation based off picture from
<https://open.spotify.com/track/12xqEseSyeeGwDYbwxJFAK>

Paul talks about how nothing is able “to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This is incredibly wonderful news for us, especially when we may not feel or see God’s hand actively doing anything for us. We can trust that like yeast making bread rise, or a seed sprouting in the earth, or breath filling a bubble, the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives.

God has infinite love for us and is infinite in glory. God’s ways compound the blessings that we have exponentially. God has ultimate power to eradicate evil and enable good to flourish.

So seek the source of all good, all life, all love, with everything that you are and have! Turn away from earthly priorities that conflict with building healthy relationships with God and with one another.

† Pray and seek to connect with God daily.

- † Nurture others in the love of Jesus, including telling those who may not know the beautiful truth.
- † Look for the Holy Spirit moving in unexpected places and people, hidden and mixed in to enrich this journey we call life.