

Parables of the Kingdom

Nelson Cathedral

Oct 5, 2025

OT Habk1:1-4, 2:1-4/Ps 37

NT 2 Tim 1:1-14

Gospel **Luke 17:1-10**

Introduction

We are all familiar with the saying “there is no “I” in Team” and that is certainly true in sports, where the best teams are those that work together, not against each other.

For the last couple of weeks, we have focused on the Lectionary readings with parables or conversations of Jesus that tell us what the kingdom of God is like.

These parables and conversations have largely focused on an individual response, but today the emphasis changes with four short illustrations about what it means to be in community.

In Jesus we hear the announcement of the Kingdom of God just as we did in the Old Testament reading from the prophet Habakkuk – a time is coming. But also in Jesus - God’s son, we see the kingdom of God present amongst us. The kingdom present now is not a place but a person, Jesus Christ just as Paul reminded Timothy.

As followers of Jesus, we have each made a personal commitment to him, but we are also being made into a new community not a gathering of individuals – a kingdom community, his body, his family, the Church. And at the heart is an attitude of humility as we exist together all equal in God’s eyes.

But as we all now, even with our own families, it takes effort to live together as differences of opinion and even squabbles can occur. So, what does Jesus say as he provides a warning, instruction, encouragement and a parable.

Warning (vs 1-3a)

The warning Jesus gives is especially focused on teachers and leaders of Kingdom communities. Jesus says, “don’t trip others up or lead them into sin”. And to really hammer the point home he says, it is better to die now than to face God’s judgement for leading people astray.

This is the kind of statement that every preacher, leader, or teacher could put on the top of their computer. This is the kind of warning Paul gave Timothy, to “hold to the standard of sound teaching” because helping people grow in faith is a serious business and not to be taken lightly. This takes humility as we recognise this role is performed under God’s gaze and through the power of God’s spirit, and is not about status, power or authority.

Instruction (Forgiveness vs 3b-4)

Jesus’ next statement is an instruction for the community on forgiveness, which is important given the seriousness of the previous warning. When mistakes are made, repentance and forgiveness can be found.

As Jesus had already said in Luke 6:37 “Forgive and you will be forgiven”. We are called to forgive others and ourselves because God has forgiven us. We affirm this every time we say the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us”.

But how often do we forgive some things but find it very difficult to forgive others, and is forgiveness really unlimited? Any google search will show you that forgiveness is a very popular subject in our world, but one that is so easily forgotten or ignored.

- *Alexander Pope*

To err is human; to forgive, divine.

- *Mahatma Gandhi*

If we practice an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, soon the whole world will be blind and toothless.

However, we see in Jesus that forgiveness is not about choosing what to forgive or not, or even how often to forgive. Forgiveness is forgiveness, because through Jesus God has forgiven us.

Putting forgiveness into practice is central to keeping the Christian community together along with accountability. As Jesus said, If we see our brother or sister in Christ fall into sin, see them stray from their faith, we are to correct them. But not out of superiority, but out of humility, as we have all been forgiven by God. And our response to our brother or sister turning from error, is to forgive.

As Bishop NT Wright states, When you forgive someone you are making yourself their servant not their master. Forgiving someone again should not get harder and harder; it shouldn't be a matter of restraining anger for longer and longer, like trying to hold your breath underwater for 10 seconds, then for 20, then for 30. If that's what it's like you've missed the meaning altogether.

The point is that you're not scoring moral points that's all. You are to be humble, to take no advantage of this situation, to give to the other person the generous and welcoming forgiveness that, as Jesus indicates on numerous occasions, God has shown you in the first place.

Encouragement (Faith, vs 5-6)

If Jesus' first two statements of warning and instruction sound difficult, his next statement is one of encouragement.

We do not enter the kingdom through our efforts, but from a change of heart – we are saved by grace alone as we see who Jesus truly is, trusting and follow him. This is the good news of the Kingdom of God, because by faith in Jesus we are forgiven.

And the encouraging point for us is that it is not the amount of faith that counts, simply its presence. As Jesus illustrates, even a small amount of faith can do amazing things, because our faith is in a great God.

And again, within a community of faith, there is no competition of faith, no “mine if greater than yours”. We all have faith which we are called to humbly put into practice.

Parable (Service, vs 7-10)

Finally, Jesus finishes with a parable that focuses on our attitude of service to God. The slave in this parable is doing his or her duty, what is required, by working in the field and then preparing a meal. The point here is that our obedience to God does not gain us merit points with God. God owes us nothing, but we owe God everything. And again, humility comes into play because that is true for every follower of Jesus, no matter what our role is in the kingdom of God. My role as a priest is no greater than your role in God's kingdom. We have all been called to serve our Lord in different ways and we are simply obeying that call.

Our genuine service is done from an attitude of gratitude, and God does honour duty done well with the words “well done my good and faithful servant,” as we enter into his presence for eternity.

Conclusion

The challenge of the Kingdom of God that Jesus presents, is a call to live as a new covenant people, and as a family to live the kingdom way here now – even in a messy world.

The kingdom of God in the present is Jesus and through Jesus it is you and I - real people alive with the transforming and energizing love of God. So that when we experience this kingdom of intimate and unlimited compassion, mercy and forgiveness, we can in turn share that with each other and also out into the world. Amen.