

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020**  
**Trinity 7 (Proper 17)**  
**Psalm 119: 129 – 136; Matthew 13: 31 – 33, 44 – 52**  
**Time to check your attitude?**

Do you have an image of heaven? What will it be like? Your answer may depend on your theology or maybe it depends on your attitude. I have a vague memory from years ago before social media memes, of a joke that was going around. It concerned a man who died and arrived at the gates of heaven, St Peter showed him around and the man was confused by two areas that seemed to be sectioned off from the rest of the place so he asked Peter why they were separate. Peter's response was that one area was for the Charismatics who believed that they were the only ones who worshipped God in the proper way. The other area was for the Roman Catholics who believed they were the only ones who got into heaven. Theology or attitude?

John's Revelation gives us a picture of heaven but it has never felt a very comfortable place to me and I rather hope that it isn't a literal picture. Jesus doesn't describe heaven particularly except possibly for a comment in John's gospel

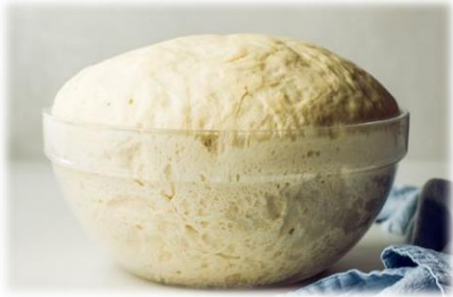
In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. Jn 14 v 2a

He does, however, speak a lot about the kingdom of heaven, the thirteenth chapter of Matthew's gospel is full of stories that illustrate the kingdom in different ways. The first two stories in today's reading are about the difference that we can make by the smallest of our actions, a mustard seed is tiny, around 2 millimetres, yet it can grow into a tree large enough to bear bird's nests. In a rural community Jesus uses the images that will mean the most to his listeners.



An action that we may think of as nothing may turn out to be a life-changing act for someone. A smile or a greeting to a stranger you pass in the street may have consequences you will never know about. It doesn't stop at actions though, our ideas and attitudes can have far-reaching and long-lasting consequences.

The second illustration he uses is of yeast, it takes only a small amount to produce a lot of dough for bread because the yeast spreads throughout the dough causing it to rise. Just as yeast spreads throughout the dough



so our attitudes spread throughout our lives. Yeast is a fungus, one that works to provide us with food but not all fungi are good just as not all of our attitudes are good so we need to check them every now and again to make sure that they are in line with the kingdom of heaven.

Psalm 119 gives us a clue as to how we can do that

Guide my steps by your word, so I will not be overcome by evil. Ps 119 v 133

We have been challenged in the last few weeks, months and years about a number of different issues – social and racial inequality, social responsibility, gender identity, the role of women in ministry, our stewardship of God's creation, climate change, and the amount of plastic waste we create. Some of those things require us to take action in some way, all of them require us to check our attitude.

Many of our attitudes can be rooted in the things we learnt as children and we can be unaware sometimes of just how deeply rooted are the things we take for granted. The language we use can show a bias, one person's terrorist is another person's freedom-fighter. Think of the way we use the words 'black' and 'white', black almost always has a negative connotation, stereo-typically the hero is dressed in white, the villain in black.

It can be hard to change attitudes that we are barely aware of holding but sometimes we need to do that. Other times it may be that we need to hold on to attitudes that the world is trying to change. Working out when to change and when to hold firm is not easy but again Psalm 119 gives us the advice

The teaching of your word gives light, so even the simple can understand. Ps 119 v 130



When it becomes too difficult to decide what our attitude should be then perhaps the best thing to do is to ask 'What Would Jesus Do?'

because his words, his actions, his attitudes are always those of the kingdom.

I don't think it matters to God whether we sing our worship, clap, raise our hands, sit quietly, meditate, pray out loud or quietly in our hearts. What matters is that we do it from the heart, that we live our worship daily, that we have kingdom attitudes and use them to govern our words and actions.

Whatever your image of heaven is it will not be close to the reality but if you want to see it, keep checking your attitude.