**7 Pentecost, July 27, 2014, Gen 29:15-28; Ps 103; Rom 8:26-39; Matt 13:21-52; Rev Mary Trainor**

Have you been swimming in one of our Wisconsin lakes? The clear, cool water holds us up, refreshes us, surrounds us, hydrates us. The feeling of being immersed in Wisconsin waters is difficult to describe to someone who has not experienced this, but oh my -- it is real, it takes us away from the cares of everyday life and transports us to a new place of joy and refreshment. Today, the Gospel calls us to be immersed in the Kingdom of God. Immersion means to be engrossed, submerged, fully and actively engaged in something....today it is the Kingdom of God. This is the single thing that Jesus talked about most frequently; Jesus wants us to live immersed in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said earlier in the Gospel of Matthew (6:33): "***Seek first the Kingdom of God***." It's supposed to be a priority for us. So, what is the Kingdom of God we are to seek? Where is it and when is it? What does it have to do with us?

The Kingdom of God is "**God's people in God's place under God's rule**." It is God's sovereignty over us, wherever we are. Unlike earthly kings, who come and go and make lots of mistakes and can be cruel, God is love, omnipresent, and eternal. Thanks to Jesus, we don’t have to wait to experience Kingdom living; it is a present reality. St. Paul put it this way in today's Romans reading: "***He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us...(nothing) can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** Theologians call this: inaugurated eschatology. In other words, Jesus brought the kingdom when He came to earth, and we believers see it now partially, and fully in heaven.

Have you seen the new technology "**google goggles**?" These are a set of high tech computer glasses you can wear and can read your email and surf the internet! Amazing! So, does it take a special set of glasses like "google goggles" or some special powers to begin to experience the Kingdom of God. No. It is an interior Kingdom that we experience through our souls. We cannot experiencing the Kingdom of God with our eyes. It is like we put on free, invisible **spiritual goggles** when we chose to connect our souls with God. God doesn't force the Kingdom upon us, we have to seek it -- and we seek it by earnestly coming to God with our whole selves. Dallas Willard writes: **“[The kingdom of God] has never been in trouble and never will be. It is not something that human beings produce or, ultimately, can hinder. We do have an invitation to be a part of it, but if we refuse we only hurt ourselves.**”

Today's Gospel includes five parables that help us gain spiritual sight, help us put on those spiritual goggles so we can experience God’s Kingdom! The first two parables speak of God's Kingdom as tiny organisms: a mustard seed and yeast. A **mustard seed** is a tiny seed (the size of a head of a pin) – that can grow into a five foot tall yellow flowered plant. **Yeast** is a microscopic single-celled fungus that, like the mustard seed, can cause abundant growth; just a pinch of yeast can inflate an entire bowl of bread dough: the dough is transformed by the yeast. The Kingdom of God, like the mustard seed and yeast cells, is not so noticeable in this world, but it can transform our lives if we immerse ourselves in it. William Booth was an ordinary guy who became yeast for Christ in the world. He was a Methodist preacher who founded the Salvation Army in 1878. He said this in response to the question about the secret of his success, "**God has all of me. There have been men with better brains, greater talents, greater opportunities, But, from the day I got a vision for what Jesus could do with the poor, I made up my mind that God would have all of William Booth there was**." Now, 136 years after the Salvation Army started, it is known to be one of the largest distributors of humanitarian aid worldwide.

The 3rd and 4th parables liken the Kingdom of God to remarkable treasures. God’s kingdom is a prize beyond any good fortune we can imagine. When the merchant encountered the **pearl** to end all pearls and when the man found the priceless **treasure in the field**, they were so captured that nothing else mattered—and they gave up everything else to have the treasures. The man and the merchant did not just say, “Oh interesting” and walk on by, nor did they decide it was not worth the risk. A human tendency is to ponder the treasure that is God’s Kingdom, and then keep on going with our lives as before -- not making the commitment, not taking the risk to love God back. These parables teach us that God’s Kingdom is worth everything!!! When we embrace the love and saving grace of Christ, immersing ourselves in it, we are blessed with joy and peace, and life is forever changed: a priceless treasure. In the 5th parable, we learn about the Kingdom of God through the metaphor of a **fishing net**. This is an ocean kind of fishing net, one that is dragged by a fishing boat and many kinds of fish are gathered up in it. This is symbolic of the fact that God's Kingdom is offered to us all: Jesus’ arms are outstretched for everyone. We are all gathered into the love of God, but, not all of us choose to accept that love.

Today, immerse yourself in the Kingdom of God - available for you now, and to anticipate. When we fix our spiritual sight on eternity and our God who reigns, we can deal better with difficult things/news around us. Ask God to help you put on spiritual goggles --here are three ways to do this:

* Listen to the "self talk" in your head. When your "self talk" says, **“I don’t feel like I can make much of a difference**” remember that this is not what Christ sees. Through prayer, your "self talk" changes to the words that Paul said in today's Epistle, “**we are more than a conquerors through Him who loved us.**” You can be yeast in the environments you live in everyday.
* When you pray the Lord’s prayer, immerse yourself: “**Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done.**” By doing this, you are praying that God's will be done in your life and then around you. Set God as THE treasure of your life.
* When you hold out your hand to receive Holy Communion, **tell** God you hunger for greater depth of His love in your life. When you receive the host, **anticipate** Jesus strengthening you.

"***Seek first the kingdom of God***" and you will find Him. In Proverbs 8:17 God says, "***I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.***" Lord Jesus, immerse us in your Kingdom today and every day. Amen.