

1 Samuel 16:1-13

1 The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you go on grieving over Saul? I have rejected him as king of Israel. But now get some olive oil and go to Bethlehem, to a man named Jesse, because I have chosen one of his sons to be king." 2 "How can I do that?" Samuel asked. "If Saul hears about it, he will kill me!" The Lord answered, "Take a calf with you and say that you are there to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. 3 Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will tell you what to do. You will anoint as king the man I tell you to." 4 Samuel did what the Lord told him to do and went to Bethlehem, where the city leaders came trembling to meet him and asked, "Is this a peaceful visit, seer?" 5 "Yes," he answered. "I have come to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. Purify yourselves and come with me." He also told Jesse and his sons to purify themselves, and he invited them to the sacrifice. 6 When they arrived, Samuel saw Jesse's son Eliab and said to himself, "This man standing here in the Lord's presence is surely the one he has chosen." 7 But the Lord said to him, "Pay no attention to how tall and handsome he is. I have rejected him, because I do not judge as people judge. They look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart." 8 Then Jesse called his son Abinadab and brought him to Samuel. But Samuel said, "No, the Lord hasn't chosen him either." 9 Jesse then brought Shammah. "No, the Lord hasn't chosen him either," Samuel said. 10 In this way Jesse brought seven of his sons to Samuel. And Samuel said to him, "No, the Lord hasn't chosen any of these." 11 Then he asked him, "Do you have any more sons?" Jesse answered, "There is still the youngest, but he is out taking care of the sheep." "Tell him to come here," Samuel said. "We won't offer the sacrifice until he comes." 12 So Jesse sent for him. He was a handsome, healthy young man, and his eyes sparkled. The Lord said to Samuel, "This is the one - anoint him!" 13 Samuel took the olive oil and anointed David in front of his brothers. Immediately the spirit of the Lord took control of David and was with him from that day on. Then Samuel returned to Ramah.

Matthew 12:46-50, 13:53-58

46 Jesus was still talking to the people when his mother and brothers arrived. They stood outside, asking to speak with him. 47 So one of the people there said to him, "Look, your mother and brothers are standing outside, and they want to speak with you." 48 Jesus answered, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" 49 Then he pointed to his disciples and said, "Look! Here are my mother and my brothers!" 50 Whoever does what my Father in heaven wants is my brother, my sister, and my mother." ...

13:53 When Jesus finished telling these parables, he left that place 54 and went back to his hometown. He taught in the synagogue, and those who heard him were amazed. "Where did he get such wisdom?" they asked. "And what about his miracles? 55 Isn't he the carpenter's son? Isn't Mary his mother, and aren't James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas his brothers? 56 Aren't all his sisters living here? Where did he get all this?" 57 And so they rejected him. Jesus said to them, "A prophet is respected everywhere except in his hometown and by his own family." 58 Because they did not have faith, he did not perform many miracles there.

Focus: The kingdom of heaven: Being the family of Christ

Function: To help listeners understand that being the family of Christ, we are to be doing God's will.

What is the kingdom of heaven like?

We started this topic 4 Sundays ago, and we have come across the kingdom of heaven as the reign of God, the presence of God, which is already here but its hiddenness requires our eyes of faith to discover and active participation in by being fruit-yielding disciples. It is gracious, encompassing all people now, and giving us time to experience the love and presence of God through Christ. It is the treasure or rarest pearl that deserves us to give up everything else and give our all to Christ to be a part of.

To wrap up this series, we have the last part of Matthew 12 and 13 in today's Gospel reading, respectively. And as we have just heard, both have something to do with Jesus's family.

Starting with the latter part, after telling the eight parables, Jesus returned to his hometown Nazareth. When he taught in the local synagogue, the people were astounded by his wisdom and the miracles he performed. However, they rejected Jesus, asking, "Isn't he the carpenter's son? Isn't Mary his mother, and aren't James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas his brothers? Aren't all his sisters living here? Where did he get all this?"

It appears that Jesus's fellow townspeople were prejudiced by their acquaintance with his family. It was a small town, so people knew one another. Many of these people could have watched Jesus grow up besides knowing his family, as such they couldn't believe Jesus was the Messiah even though they were amazed by his words and deeds. I wonder why.

Apparently, their minds were closed to the idea that God's Messiah was chosen to grow up in their midst. In brushing off this possibility, they chose to reject the amazing gift God sent them. They were stuck in their belief that Jesus was a carpenter's son and nothing more. As a result, Jesus did not perform many miracles there because of their lack of faith. They had missed out on God's blessings for them in the kingdom of heaven.

Perhaps it is simply human nature to judge a book by its cover, so to speak. Interestingly, in John 1, when Philip told Nathanael about Jesus of Nazareth, the one whom Moses wrote about in the book of the Law and whom the prophets also wrote about, Nathanael's immediate reaction was "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (see 1:45-46).

Do we sometimes fall into similar traps, being judgmental of others too? Do we fail to recognise God's gift in someone just because we know them well and for a long time? Have we prejudged them with our preconceived ideas? What should we do otherwise?

The first reading from 1 Samuel 16 gives us a good example. This was the time when God wanted to select a new king to replace Saul, so Samuel was sent to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the new king. His task was relatively easy because God assured him that God would tell him what to do, including who to anoint as king.

But when Samuel was there with Jesse, the moment he set eyes on Jesse's eldest son, Eliab, he immediately thought, "This man standing here in the Lord's presence is surely the one God has chosen." Perhaps Eliab had all that a good leader would look like, but God stopped Samuel from getting ahead of himself, saying, "Pay no attention to how tall and handsome he is. I have rejected him because I do not judge as people judge. They look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart."

Most of us may have acted like Samuel before, if not often, without any discernment; we hastily jumped the gun and arrived at conclusions. We may not have even prayed for God's guidance or waited for an answer after praying, and we took off. Perhaps sometimes we lack the patience to wait for God to show us the way; other times, we may think we know enough and can make good decisions.

Just as God reminded Samuel not to look at one's appearance but at the heart, we are reminded of the same too, not to be judgmental and prejudiced, not to look at matters or people on surface value, but to be patient and discerning.

When we discern, we let go of our preconceived ideas, quieting down our own voice to listen to God's voice as the Spirit speaks to our hearts. We pray as we seek God's guidance, looking for the Spirit to point us to the right option and the correct path to embark on. In Matthew 7, Jesus urges us, saying, "Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. ... because our Father in heaven will give good things to those who ask him!" Therefore, we ought to have patience and wait upon Christ. Moreover, since God looks at our hearts, hence it is essential that we desire to do what God desires, and we strive to be doing God's will all the time while giving God our full trust and obedience.

Samuel began to patiently listen to God's prompting as all seven adult sons of Jesse were brought before him one by one, but none of them was God's choice. Eventually, young David, who was shepherding in the field, was brought in, and God prompted Samuel, saying, "This is the one, anoint him!"

In our journey of discerning God's call at any point in life, any opportunity that comes to us will be like Jesse's sons being presented before Samuel, requiring us to wait for God's prompting and seek God's approval. In other words, we ask God to close the door that is not his choice and open the door that he desires us to step forward. If we rush to a decision, we will easily be like Samuel wanting to anoint Eliab upon setting eyes on him. So, may we be patient as we discern God's will?

Indeed, doing God's will is the key to the kingdom of heaven.

In the first part of today's Gospel reading, Jesus's mother and brothers came looking for him while he was teaching the crowds inside a house. They got someone to pass him the message, and the messenger told Jesus, "Look, your mother and brothers are standing outside, and they want to speak with you."

What's the urgent matter? It is not mentioned. And what happened to Jesus's mother and brothers after this? We are not told too. But our focus is directed onto Jesus's response.

In asking a rhetorical question, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Jesus stirred up people's curiosity as they wondered why he asked that and the answer. And he followed on with the answer: "Look! Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does what my Father in heaven wants is my brother, my sister, and my mother."

Let us step back to see the fuller picture of the literary structure of Matthew 13, starting with these last 5 verses of Matthew 12:

It begins with the question: "Who is the family of Jesus?" Followed by the eight parables that we have covered over the last four Sundays, i.e.

- The Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Parable of the Yeast, which point us to the hiddenness of the kingdom of heaven. It is already here, needing us to discover it with faith to thrive in it;
- The Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the homeowner of the house, which point us to the welcomeness of the kingdom, drawing our response to be fruit-yielding disciples of Christ;
- The Parable of the Wheat & Weeds and the Parable of the Fish & Net, which point us to the graciousness of the kingdom, drawing us to seize the moment, and help others to experience this grace too.
- The Parable of the Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl, which point us to the pricelessness of the kingdom, drawing us to willingly give up all things that will distract us from God and give our time, gifts, love, etc to Christ in reaching out and caring for others in need.

Then the chapter wraps up with the family of Jesus again.



This is like a Sandwich with “the family of Jesus” as the two pieces of bread sandwiching the eight parables. And since it is what is in between that defines the sandwich; therefore, we have here “the kingdom of heaven sandwich”.

With this picture of the kingdom of heaven sandwich in mind, let us come back to what Jesus said: “Whoever does what my Father in heaven wants is my brother, my sister, and my mother.”

May we bear this in mind: By doing the will of God, we are a part of the family of God, we are Jesus’s brothers and sisters, we are God’s sons and daughters, in the kingdom of heaven with God as the Father. Isn’t this amazing? Blessed are we being the family of Christ! So let us be always after God’s heart and do God’s will. Amen.

Matthew 13: About the kingdom of heaven		
12:46-50	Who is the family of Jesus	
13:1-9	Parable of the Sower	Welcomeness Be fruitful
13:24-30	Parable of the wheat & weeds	
13:31-32	Parable of the mustard	Hiddenness
13:33	Parable of the yeast	Faith is needed
13:44	Parable of the treasure	Pricelessness
13:45-46	Parable of the pearl	Give up for & to
13:47-50	Parable of the fish & net	Graciousness Thrive & be ready
13:51-52	Parable of the master of the house	
13:53-58	Because of the family of Jesus	