

Hiddenness

[Genesis 29:15-28](#)

[Psalms 105:1-11, 45b](#)

[Romans 8:26-39](#)

[Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52](#)

Do you remember playing hide and go seek as a kid? Coming from the Camping World of outdoor adventure, we used to facilitate extreme variations on the game for teenagers. One version was played at night with teams competing against one another with flashlights. You can imagine the wildness of playing hiding games in the dark in the forest with groups of amped up campers. Occasionally the teams would get confused and sometimes kids would get lost altogether. It was crazy fun! - But it's kind of weird that hide and seek games are fun. According to psychologists, one of the reasons children crave hide and seek games so much is because it teaches “object permanence”. Basically, it proves that things and people that disappear still exist and will return. It reinforces a deep sense of psychological safety which is essential for development. Another reason this game is so beloved is because there is something profoundly joyful about being loved and pursued, especially when the experience is reciprocated.

This morning I am thinking about hide and seek because all our texts point to the hidden ways of God. They are easily discerned in the parable, but equally true in the Old Testament. It's natural for us to read the stories from Genesis and forget where they fall in the timeline of history. We've been reading these stories for thousands of years, but the characters in them did not have a Bible. They were learning about God for the first time. In many ways, the book of Genesis is like the first games of peekaboo that mothers play with their babies, the precursor to hide and seek. At the time when these stories were written, the patriarchs were just beginning to learn object permanence with God. They were just starting to feel the love of a God who pursued them. And so, they often missed it. The work of God was often hidden to them. But if we're honest, all these millennia later we are still

juveniles at this game. God's activity is hidden from us, not because God does not want to be found, but because we are terrible at accurately identifying the things we see.

We know God is big and powerful and so we expect God to show up in ways that illustrate that. But that is not how hide and seek works. God shows up in the unanticipated places to teach us to trust and look for and believe even when what we see doesn't make sense to us. Take the story of Rachel and Leah for example. Rachel was the flashy sister, the one Jacob loved and wanted. In this story, Leah is the mustard seed, the unwanted, overlooked, not obvious place where God was working. Leah became the mother of Judah, the mother of David, the grandmother of the Messiah. The promised line of the covenant came through the woman nobody wanted. Genesis is full of stories of God choosing to bless and work through those humans overlook. And in this story, we see the kingdom hidden inside a story Jacob did not choose; a story he failed to recognize as central to the one God was telling.

We humans have a problem with misrecognition. We assume a large tree needs a big seed, not a tiny one like a mustard seed. We assume the covenant heir should be the firstborn, the child of the most loved wife. All the while, God is hiding the Kingdom, teaching us to look again. It isn't that we don't see what is happening, it's just that we fail to recognize God's hand at work within it, especially when what we're looking at frustrates our desires or conflicts with our expectations. The stories of Genesis teach us to trust that God is at work but question our assumptions about where that activity is truly happening.

Today's parables highlight this principle. We expect God to show up in dramatic ways, but the kingdom is like yeast. For those of you who are not bakers, it takes a nearly imperceptible amount of yeast to begin the process of fermentation that makes bread rise. To make his point, Jesus says the woman in our parable hides this tiny yeast inside 50 pounds of flour. The point is that the kingdom starts small, it works from the inside out, and it is invisible, often hidden from sight, rather than a spectacle for people to gape at.

The Kingdom is a quietly transformative process. God IS here, God IS working, the kingdom IS growing. Our inability to perceive it, says more about us than it does about God.

The hiddenness of God's activity is something believers have always wrestled with. Paul talks about it by quoting David, "we are being killed all day long, we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered". The fact of persecution and distress, of suffering lack and enduring hardship, are part of the human experience. But they are not the whole story. Paul says that even while we may appear to be victims, we are in fact, conquerors. Nothing can separate us from God's love. God is the one who justifies, helps, and sustains us. It is God who works in and through the pain of human life to accomplish the work of the kingdom. When we are suffering, when the people we love are hurting, this may feel like a distant and unsatisfying hope. But it is the opposite. God is not resting comfortably apart from trouble. God is with us in the midst of it. God is, in fact, in the mustard seed; God is in the yeast. God is here. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power hiding in the mustard seed, working in the yeast, praying in us when we have no words. The work God started will be completed. Nothing can separate us from God's love. Knowing that God's love is present and God's kingdom is active, even in our darkest times, inspires us to look for it. Our Psalmist tells us to seek God out, to search and rejoice continually. This Psalm specifically tells Jacob's children to remember the stories of God's covenant faithfulness; stories like Leah's that prove God's active presence even though that activity was hidden from Jacob's view at the time. David understood the satisfaction, strength, and confidence that comes from a life built on trusting God's presence and looking for God's nearness, even when it is hidden.

Jesus' parables teach us that once we see the kingdom at work, it changes everything. One person happened to stumble across the treasure. In another case a merchant looked hard to find it. In both cases, once they identified it, everything else in their lives became

secondary. Their priorities entirely reordered. It may be difficult to notice the hand of God, but once we see it, it's more difficult to ignore. The joy of it reshapes us.

At the conclusion of these parables, Jesus uses a scribe to describe what wisdom looks like. It's interesting because Jesus typically lumps the scribes in with pharisees as a trope for people who know God's words through the Law, but they cannot identify the same God's hand at work in front of them. But here, we see a scribe who is honored. This is the one who knows God. Who has been trained to recognize God's activity from the past and trusts it in the present. Essentially, the honored scribe is the one who has learned the lesson of Hide and Seek. They know God is present and at work. They can identify value apart from what is immediately visible or even desirable. They trust God's love will continue and it will grow, even when it is difficult to see. To be like this scribe, we too must be trained for the kingdom. We must learn to resist judgment, interrogate our perceptions and assumptions, value the things that appear unimpressive, and learn to recognize God's activity in the places we've never noticed. Being trained for the kingdom includes a recognition of the treasures available to us from the past and the treasures available to us now, even though they may be difficult to see. - It begins at the altar where we trust the kingdom hidden in the bread and the wine, ordinary, unimpressive things that become something of immeasurable value when we open ourselves to receive them.

May we be a people who trust God, even when the kingdom is hidden from our view. May we learn to look for God's activity in unexpected places. And may we be willing to open ourselves and reorient our lives around the kingdom's work when God makes it visible to us.