

**Sunday, July 30, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**  
**Bible Study**  
**“Hidden & Mixed In”**  
**Genesis 29:15-28 and Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “Have you had an experience where something was hidden, and later you found it?”

**Genesis 29:15-28. Context.** In this week’s reading the trickster Jacob meets his match in his father-in-law-to-be, Laban. But family relationships only get more complicated from here on, with Jacob and Laban trying to “out-trick” one another, Leah and Rachel competing as mothers; now-loving, now-strained relations between husband and wives; and bitterness between father and daughters. Ultimately, Leah and Rachel and their two servant girls, Zilpah and Bilhah, bear eleven sons and one daughter to Jacob, and they all go to Canaan to settle (Benjamin was born sometime after they arrived) – but not without Laban chasing after them!

**Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52. Context.** This week’s reading gives five parables, all related to the coming of the kingdom of God, but in different ways. The first two stress the surprising and dramatic nature of its coming: mustard seeds never produce trees; yeast is a bad thing (rotten - think sourdough), and the amount of flour is prodigious. The next two (the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price) stress that one who discovers the kingdom is willing to give up everything else to possess it. The fifth parable sounds more like the parable of the weeds and the wheat, where the good and the bad will be separated at the end of the age, the former to blessing and the latter to punishment. Jesus’ saying in the last verse is in fact a parable about parables: a way of speaking that uses old, familiar images and ideas from Scripture, but applies them in new ways.

**Read Genesis 29:15-28 and Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

**Read Genesis 29:15-28 and Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 again -**

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

When Jacob woke up after the wedding, who was his first wife? [It was Rachel’s sister, Leah]. Why did Laban do that? [“Laban said, “This is not done in our country--giving the younger before the firstborn.””] What did Jacob need to do to marry Rachel? What is your reaction to the story? Which character do you associate with? (Jacob, Leah, Rachel, Laban, or others?)

Pick one or two parables from the Matthew reading and discuss them in the group. (If you have time, please feel free to discuss them all.)

- The Parable of the Mustard Seed and Yeast: Discuss the symbolism of the mustard seed and yeast representing the hidden and small beginnings of the kingdom. [The kingdom starts small but expands and encompasses many people from various backgrounds. It shows the transformative power and growth of God's kingdom.] Where do you see a small beginning (like a mustard seed) having great potential to grow in your church and community for the kingdom of God?
- The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Value: Explore the significance of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value. What might you do to seek the kingdom in a hidden place? What might you give up for God this week to better pursue the kingdom?
- The Parable of the Fishing Net: Discuss the idea of the fishing net gathering both good and bad fish. What might you do this week to be accountable for God's guidance? Only God does the work of separation. Our role is to help get people into the net. What might you do to gather people into the net this week?

“Our invitation, then, is to find the treasure in the midst of the ordinary. We can look for glimpses of the kingdom alongside or even within the mundane, everyday struggles of living life in a complicated and sometimes broken world.” What action might you plan this week to find glimpses of the kingdom? What might you do to see something as small as a mustard seed grow a big tree in your home, church, and community? What signs of the kingdom do we see in our community? What might it look like if we did see signs of the kingdom in our community?

### **Closing Reflection Question**

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

**Prayer** (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Creator God, this is Your world! May we be reminded of the power of small beginnings and humble acts of faith, knowing that even the tiniest seed can grow into a mighty tree, and a pinch of yeast can transform a whole batch of dough. Teach us to recognize the hidden treasures of your kingdom and to value them above all else, understanding that true joy and fulfillment are found in seeking and embracing your divine presence. Grant

us wisdom to discern your teachings and share them with others, becoming faithful stewards of your word. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven

hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power

and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.