

Matthew 13:47-52 Simply fish (different from audio version)

Get children to go round church and collect up the pictures.

Then sort out what's good to eat and what's bad.

Who would want to eat an old wellie and chips? Yuk!

In our reading this morning Jesus tells a story about the kingdom of heaven. He says, imagine that it is like two boats with a huge dragnet between them – these days we have massive factory ships which do the same thing – the two boats sail along with the dragnet between them and it scoops up everything in its path – everything!

It's an absolutely brilliant way to catch all the fish, in fact it's so brilliant at catching all the fish it catches everything else too, nothing escapes. Then the net is hauled onto the boat with all the fish in it. But there's a problem, you've hauled the other stuff into your boat too. You can't just take everything you've caught off to market, or send it all to the food processing plant. You have to sort it all out.

I mean, imagine you didn't sort it out. Who would want to sit down to their tea and instead of a nice Birds Eye Simply Fish in batter find they had an eel in batter! Or imagine you went to fishmonger and instead of a nice trout he tried to sell you a jellyfish because that's what he'd found when he unpacked the catch he'd been delivered.

I don't think that you would be very impressed.

No, someone sorts it all out, they put the cod, or the tuna in one box and they throw away all the inedible things, all the unsuitable things – all the things which shouldn't be there.

And Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like that. There are lots of people who would say that Christianity is a personal thing, “It’s something that’s good for you, but it’s not for me.” As if it were a hobby – stamp collecting or golf, but in these verses from Matthew’s Gospel Jesus makes it clear that it isn’t like that at all.

Do you remember that game at school where one person was “it” and everyone else had to run from one end of the playground to the other without getting caught? Pretty soon they tagged someone else and they had to hold hands and tag a third person and the chain got longer and longer. Eventually there would be one or two people stood at one end of the playground and a massive chain of people sweeping across it – there was no escape and the game would be over.

Just like everything in the path of the dragnet that person in the playground could not escape being caught and Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is the same. He says, there’s no point pretending that Christianity is nice for one person and irrelevant for another, one day everyone – everyone - will have to stand before God and be judged for their sins, there is no getting out of it.

Like everything before the dragnet, like the children in the playground – everyone will be included and then just as the fishermen sort out their catch and throw away what is inappropriate, the angels will be charged with taking the wicked away from God.

Well, that sounds a bit unfair doesn’t it? Can’t everyone get into heaven? But cast your mind back to the Royal Wedding last week.

Imagine that you'd heard about it, but decided that it wasn't for you, you were just going to get on with life, maybe do something fun on Friday; a spot of gardening, play on the Wii, go out for a walk. Other people could stay at home and watch the wedding on the box if they wanted, but not you.

Then one morning you receive an invitation in the post to the wedding – Wow! But what's your reaction? "That's nice" you think, "but I'd rather redecorate the downstairs loo on Friday – it's a little more relevant to me."

Friday morning comes, but something weird has happened, you (along with everyone else) have woken up in a guest room in Buckingham palace but you wake up because a team of SAS and Special Branch officers have just burst into your room and are pointing weapons at you.

Who are you?

What are you doing there?

What gives you the right to be at the wedding?

You protest that you were sent an invitation, that you always quite liked the Royal Family, that you would have replied if you thought it was this serious, but it does you no good. You never replied to the invitation, your name is not on the guest list and you are dragged off past rooms full of people putting on their best clothes ready to celebrate – people who replied "Yes" to their invitations and you're thrown into jail!

Unfair? But, you had every opportunity to take up that invitation, you were told about the wedding, you were sent a personal invitation, you didn't have to do anything, you hadn't earned the right to be there, you just had to say "yes", but because you couldn't be bothered, because you had more "important" things to do you turned it down again and again, how can you then expect to be allowed in? It's actually perfectly fair.

So how can we enter into the kingdom of heaven?

Jesus says the answers are in here – the Bible, Jesus describes it as an amazing storeroom.

Did or do any of you have grandparents who just seem to have an unending supply of amazing things stashed away in their homes? Parents, haven't you noticed that your parents are much more lenient, generous and relaxed with your children than they ever were with you?

I once heard someone describe it like this – they said that grandchildren are God's reward for not murdering your own kids. Maybe that's why they are different with them. But whatever the reason, perhaps you know or can remember a grandparent who, every time you went round there would bring something amazing out for you to see, something old, something from their childhood, something delicate, intricately made, perhaps an heirloom and it fascinated you – it was a real treasure.

But it wasn't just old things, when they splashed the cash you were the first person they allowed to programme their video player, or play on their computer, or access their mobile phone. Treasures old and new.

Jesus says, anyone who understands the Kingdom of heaven, who takes the scriptures and shares them faithfully with other people is like that grandparent; They take the wonders of the Old Testament and show how they point to the amazing loving truth of the New Testament; that the Scriptures show how Jesus is the invitation to the Kingdom of Heaven for everyone; that on the cross he died for our sins, that on the first Easter Day he rose to new life to show us he had defeated our sin and that he now reigns at God's right hand in glory.

And there God will judge everyone, not on what they have done to be good, but on whether or not they have trusted in Jesus' rescuing work. And how will people know about Jesus? You are going to tell them.

Jesus says, if you tell people the truth of the Bible then you are like someone who goes into their house and brings out old and new treasures – not tat, not trinkets, but treasure.

And if we hear that message, if we ask God to forgive us through Jesus and if we trust in Jesus as our Lord and saviour then the great news is that we move from being an old wellie, to being a lovely cod!

It's not a great analogy, I know, but this is what it means, it means that we will be acceptable to God in heaven, not through anything we have done, but through everything Jesus has done for us.

Sometimes we hear about great pieces of art, bought by private collectors who then lock them away so that the public can't see them. What a tragedy. But we have been given amazing treasures in the Bible and the specific instruction not to lock them away, but to make them public; Jesus says "every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old"

And the experts reckon that when Jesus talks here about "teachers of the law" he doesn't mean the religious experts of the day – he's talking about his disciples, so that's you – and you – and you. My job is to instruct you about the Kingdom of Heaven, so that you can reveal these treasures to your friends and families.

So, you've handed out the Easter eggs (all eaten) you've stashed away the Royal wedding souvenir mug so that in generations to come it will be a valuable heirloom (really?) why not get out your best treasure, the treasure which is eternal and priceless, why not share the good news of the risen Lord Jesus so that no one you know and love will ever be lost on the day of judgement?

Amen.