

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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July 26, 2026

In today's gospel, Jesus talks about the “kingdom of heaven,” or what we might translate as the “reign of heaven.” And the thing about the reign of heaven is that Jesus never let it sit still long enough for us to define it. First, it was like a mustard seed. Then it was like leaven hidden in flour. Then treasure buried in a field, a merchant searching for a pearl, a net thrown into the sea, and an owner bringing out treasures both new and old. Every time that we thought that we understood what Jesus meant, the picture changed. And in nearly every picture, something important was happening beyond what anyone can immediately see.

And we know something about living when the picture is shifting and much of what comes next cannot yet be seen. Today, we will welcome ten new members and we will be launching confirmation classes for the first time in over a decade. At the same time, our pastoral life will look different without a full-time intern this year and we learned this week that Dr. Jordan will leave in two weeks after more than a decade of ministry. That is a lot to hold at once. Some of it is joyful. Some of it is painful. Much of it is both.

There is no honest way to speak about this moment without acknowledging that Dr. Jordan's departure is a significant loss. For more than ten years, he has helped shape how we pray, sing, celebrate, grieve, laugh, and listen for God. We celebrate the remarkable new calling before him, where his gifts

will serve students and the wider church. And still, we are sad because this ministry—and this relationship—matter. For, as we remembered last Sunday, tears are not a failure of faith. They are love telling the truth.

And perhaps that is why the image of the leaven feels especially important today. Jesus says that God's reign is like a woman who hides leaven in three measures of flour—which is something like forty or fifty pounds. Then, into that massive amount of flour she hides a little bit of leaven until it disappears. Once added, you cannot point to it or pull it back out. Yet quietly, it permeates the whole until there is enough bread to feed an entire community.

That is one way grace works in a community. People enter our lives. They pray beside us, challenge us, sing with us, and help us glimpse God. Over time, the life we share changes us. People may move, roles may change, and seasons may end, but the grace God has worked through our shared life does not simply disappear. After all, the ministry we have shared with Dr. Jordan has formed this community in ways that will continue to shape us. While worship will sound different and a beloved season will end, love and grace have already done real work among us. For God's grace may be unseen—and it is still unfolding.

And today, while we hold these endings, ten people are entering more fully into our shared life. Welcoming new members does not simply add ten people to the congregation we already are. After all, leaven changes the whole batch. So too, these new members bring stories, questions, wisdom, gifts, and experiences of God that we need. They are not supporting characters in a story the rest of us have already written. Instead, their lives will help shape what we become, just as this community will become part of

their stories. And genuine welcome means admitting that we do not yet know exactly who we will become together.

Back in today's gospel the mustard seed offers a similar image. Mustard was useful, but also unruly. It would spread beneath the soil and appeared where a farmer might not want it. In our lives, we would prefer a clear plan, a smooth transition, and some reassurance that everything we value will remain intact. But Jesus compares God's reign to mustard that gets loose, grows beyond our boundaries, and shelters birds we did not expect. For God's reign may be unseen—and it is still unfolding beyond the boundaries we set.

Jesus ends the series with an owner bringing out treasures new and old. It's important to remember that not everything old is a treasure, and not everything new is part of God's reign. The work that accompanies this is discernment. And, this Saturday, our Congregation Council will gather for its annual retreat to pray, listen, and discover what God may be bringing forth among us – this is the discernment work that God's reign requires.

So too, next month, WPLC will celebrate 147 years of ministry—147 years of pastors, musicians, and members arriving and departing; ministries beginning and ending; a building, neighborhood, and congregation changing. Through it all, God has continued to meet people here— sometimes unmistakably and sometimes beneath the surface. And we carry the music that has formed us. We receive the voices joining us. We honor ministries that are ending. We make room for ministries we cannot yet imagine. Unseen—and still unfolding.

In a few moments, longtime and new members, people grieving and celebrating, people arriving and preparing to leave will come to this table. We do not come because we know exactly what WPLC will look like next year. We come because Christ is here: hidden in ordinary bread and wine, given before we understand, and always present before the future becomes clear.

Dear friends, for today, that is God's gift and that is enough. Christ holds what has been. Christ receives what is new. And Christ is shaping us into a body spacious enough for grief, for gratitude, for change, and for hope. While God's work may be unseen—it is still unfolding. Amen.