

For: April 18: Luke 13-16

*Stories of the Upside-Down Kingdom*  
*Luke 13-16*

As we've been hearing every Sunday in April, Jesus is a different kind of king. God is always surprising, I've discovered. In that case, it shouldn't surprise us that his king and his kingdom is full of surprises. Reading Luke 13-16, I realized that every parable (story) Jesus told about his kingdom was a parable about how unexpected the kingdom of God is compared to, well, to what we would expect. But these stories help us make sense of the kingdom-realities by presenting them in terms of everyday realities that already make sense to us because we've stopped seeing the surprise in them. Thus, the kingdom of heaven is like a tiny seed, but a tiny seed can grow into a huge tree. God's kingdom and God's work and God's ways are like a seed that looks small and fragile, nondescript and non-noteworthy. How shocked the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day and the Roman political leaders would be to see a body of worshipers around the world today of the king they thought they'd disposed of and wrote off as dead and buried!

And so on for all the parables Jesus told. Read them today not as stories you've read a thousand times and to which you already know the endings. Read them looking for the surprises of God's kingdom in them. We can find the same kind of surprise from God's kingdom that we can notice from our everyday realities when we really stop to notice them. It's almost as though the surprising God who showed up on earth in disguise as a working man with calloused hands is the same God who created all the other surprising realities that surround us. One thing you'd have to admit about the Christian story: whether you believe it or not, you'd have to agree that it has some amazing plot twists. A life lived following Jesus will never be boring.