



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

The Kingdom of heaven is like... baking bread

Sunday 26 July 2026

Genesis 29:15-28

Romans 8:26-39

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

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I wonder if you're currently in a period of waiting for something? And if so, what are you waiting for?

The summer holidays – or maybe they've just started?

The weather to get a bit cooler – or maybe by the time you're seeing this, it will be cooler – here's hoping!

For England to finally win the World cup? You could be waiting a while!

And how do you find the process of waiting? Maybe it depends on what you are waiting for! Much as we may, or may not, like it, waiting is a part of life.

And that's equally true of the life of faith too, perhaps particularly so. Jesus' parables today, following on from those of last week, contain further teaching about what the Kingdom of heaven is like, making it clear that waiting is part of our discovery of the Kingdom. We catch glimpses of the kingdom of heaven – God's way of doing things - in Jesus' life and teaching, but it will not be fully revealed until Jesus comes again. And so Jesus says the kingdom of heaven:

- is like waiting for a mustard seed to grow.
- or like waiting for some dough to rise to make bread.
- or, and admittedly this is borrowing from last week's reading, it's like waiting for seeds to grow and finding out that the field contains not only your best crop, but also weeds. (I don't know about you, but my experience is that the weeds seem to grow faster than other seeds, although maybe that says something about perspective!)

And Jesus also makes it clear that waiting for the kingdom to come, and indeed the life of faith more generally, requires patience.

Jacob knew this, as is clearly demonstrated in our reading from Genesis. I wonder how he felt as he found out he would have to wait another seven years for Rachel. Even if we're told that the measure of his love was seen in the fact that those seven years seemed to him but a few days, still.... I'm sure it felt a long time.

But why did he wait – presumably because it, or rather she, was worth waiting for.

In a similar way Jesus also makes it clear in the subsequent parables in our Gospel reading, that we wait knowing the value of the kingdom: like treasure hidden in a field, or a pearl of great value. Its value draws on both old treasures: the ancient stories and the hope of Israel, alongside the new vision of the Kingdom.

But that's not all. Indeed, I think that the value of waiting for the kingdom lies not only in knowing what will come, but also in the very process of waiting itself. If we believe

alongside Paul as he writes his letter to the church in Rome, that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purposes, surely this must include the waiting times too. Although admittedly that may be harder to see, especially when we are in the middle of it.

To wait like that requires faith, to hold on to that promise even when it seems very unlikely. Indeed, what Paul says is at its heart a statement of faith: that God is at work, and we see this in God's steadfast commitment to creation, and in God's rescuing of creation from the bondage to decay. The God who also loves us so completely, so intimately, and which nothing can separate us from.

But back to the parables, and maybe it's because I enjoy making bread, I'd like to particularly focus on the parable of the yeast and the bread.

You cannot make bread without waiting. It's not a process you can rush. If you rush bread making you can end up with the dense and rubbery bread which has less flavour. I know, I've been there!

Waiting for things in life can be hard, particularly when we don't know how long something will take, or that changes. Similarly, you can have the perfect recipe for proving dough, and then that's all messed up by atmospheric temperature – as they've found out more than once in the Great British Bake Off tent!

So waiting is important. Things happen as we wait. Often they are unseen, at least over a short period of time, like dough, although we might notice the impact over a longer period. You might not see the fermentation, or how it's happening, yet you can see the result. As the yeast begins to consume sugars in the flour, and carbon dioxide is produced, those bubbles of gas cause the dough to expand and rise. This waiting time is needed to make a light and airy well-baked bread

Some things can't be rushed. If you prove dough too fast you'll know about it. The bread won't taste right – I wonder if that can also have parallels in other situations in our lives.

And there are also other very important parts of the process in making bread alongside the proving. Knocking back the dough is really important too. Knocking back is my favourite part, you do it to remove large air bubbles and redistribute the yeast, making the texture better and the rise more even. Knocking back makes better bread.

Which also got me thinking whether it is in any sense possible to see the 'knock-backs' that we may face in life in life, perhaps particularly when we are waiting for something that we are longing for, as something which can shape us in more positive ways too.

Which is of course not to say that we seek them out, or can necessarily see how they are shaping us in a positive way at the time, but eventually, when we see the outcome, might

we be able to join with Paul in saying that all things work together for good for those who love God?

Which is not to minimise the potential pain of these times. And here I take comfort from knowing that Paul was in jail a short while before he wrote these words, and indeed would be again soon. He is not writing this from a place of comfort. They are the words of one who understood hardship and challenge at a deep level.

So, what enabled him to say these words? I think in large part it was because of what he had lived through and witnessed: primarily the death and resurrection of Jesus. Events which made real the love of which he spoke. A love which goes deeper than all the forces at work in the powers and principalities.

Paul could therefore look on his circumstances, as challenging as they were, with faith and hope, because of his faith in God's faithfulness, in God's good purposes, and in God's love. He saw this in Jesus's life, and was helped to hold on these promises in his moments of weakness by the Spirit who was at work in him, as it tells us in verse 26.

And so there can be, I believe, an encouragement for us as we wait too. To wait with patience for whatever we are waiting for, whether that is a situation to be righted, or for justice, or something else. As we wait for the coming of the kingdom of heaven in all its fulness, when God's ways will be established throughout the earth, we can also wait with hope because of God's faithfulness, even through the times of knock backs in life. Indeed, it may even be possible, as hard as this is, and not underestimating the pain that they can bring, (and may require the gift of hindsight to see) that there is something in these knockbacks which shape us in good ways. Trusting that all things do indeed work together for good for those who love our faithful God, who are called according to his purposes. And from whose love nothing can separate us.