

July 27, 2014 God Surprising Us Now

This week, I've been reading poetry by Billy Collins.

I'm working on some Bible Studies for the coming year that will include poetry.

I've actually been enjoying it.

Most poems I don't get...but I get Billy Collins.

Good poetry, like any good storytelling, takes you on a journey.

You see things in new light... you see the bigger the truth of things.

Good poetry sparks wonder about life.

Good poetry compels you to see connections long forgotten...to be in awe of life.

Jesus was a storyteller.

He spoke in parables.

He often used an earthy story to communicate truth about God.

When you listen to Jesus, you have to listen for the meaning...the truth...the beauty...the wonder.

You can't get caught up in the details, or you will miss the amazing reality to which he pointed.

You cannot approach the parables as a scientist, analyzing and dissecting.

You can't listen to them as a historian, locating them in the timeline of human existence.

Listening to parables is more like...

sitting on the shore, and letting the waves of the ocean wash up against you...

playing in the yard as a child, and finding this most amazing thing in the grass...

flying in a jet over gaping canyons and stark mountains and patterned fields.

Jesus spoke in parables, compelling us to find God's grace infused into our world.

The kingdom of heaven is like...

As soon as he starts talking that way, you have to pay attention.

You know he's going to say something profound in a very simple way.

The kingdom of heaven is like...

Those words are wormholes into life with God.

They transport you into a new world.

The kingdom of heaven is like...

There you spirit is fed in ways entertainers and advertisers cannot.

There you find the gems that reflect the light.

The kingdom of heaven is like...a mustard seed.  
It looks so small that you miss it...but it is so huge.  
It appears to many as insignificant...but it is the most important dimension of life.  
Can anything good come from a mustard seed? God makes it home for everyone.

The kingdom of heaven is like...yeast.  
It is hidden in flour...but it is that which makes all the difference for the bread.  
It is small in quantity...but huge in quality.  
It is quietly the most important ingredient in life.  
It is that which gives life...grows life...expands life.

The kingdom of heaven is like...finding a treasure in a field.  
The burden of work is replaced by the joy of discovery.  
You weren't expecting it...it comes to you suddenly.  
Monotony and boredom...turn to newness and excitement.  
Action without value to you...becomes action with supreme value.  
You discover paradise right in the midst of life.

The kingdom of heaven is like...a precious pearl.  
It is of greater beauty than anything you had before.  
It is worth giving up everything else to obtain it.  
It rejuvenates and invigorates.  
It becomes the most important thing you can have.

The kingdom of heaven is like...a full fishing net.  
How satisfying that is.  
How joyful that is.  
How helpful that is for daily living.  
How much delight that brings to one's heart.

As I listen to these parables spoken by Jesus, I hear God telling us that the grace of God surrounds us each and every day.  
We just need to open our eyes and our ears, our hearts and our spirits.  
The kingdom of God, the reign of God, is not just for the here after; it is also for the here and now.  
When we pray "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven", we pray that we will recognize God's reign in our very midst.

While reading The Christian Century this week, I was captured by these words from Pastor Sue Steiner:

“I pray for eyes to glimpse the hidden, sometimes startling way, the kingdom of heaven is already present.

I pray for insight to see the familiar territory of my own life and community with reign-of-God eyes.

I look for signs of mustard seeds germinating and for the smell of yeast leavening...”

Let me tell you about Taylor Wilson, who lives on the Texas-Arkansas border.

He wasn't like the other kids. Thank God.

At the age of eight, he didn't just dream of being an astronaut.

He decided to build his own rocket.

He set up a chemistry lab in the garage and began designing his own rockets and making his own fuel.

At the age of nine, Taylor showed up at Thanksgiving Dinner wearing a lab coat and armed with a handful of medical lancets.

He announced to the clan that he wanted to draw blood from each of them for “comparative genetic experiments.”

Each member of the extended family offered a finger to be pricked.

Taylor brought the samples to his lab...then returned with a chart listing everyone's blood types.

Not bad for a nine-year-old.

At the age of eleven, Taylor found his life calling: nuclear science.

A science fair project sparked his interest.

He began learning, doing experiments, and teaching others about radioactivity.

At the age of 13, he had his epiphany.

You see, his grandmother developed terminal cancer.

Taylor saw the need to get radioactive isotopes, used to diagnose and treat cancer, to patients in a faster, safer way.

He knew the problems: isotopes are extremely short-lived...they require very expensive handling...they can only be made at multimillion dollar cyclotrons.

But Taylor had a vision.

What if...he could build a tabletop nuclear fusion reactor that was small enough, cheap enough, and safe enough to produce medical isotopes as needed in every hospital in the world?

So at the age of 13, Taylor began building a nuclear fusion reactor in the garage. Now this concerned his parents, Ken and Tiffany Wilson. Most parents would squash these shenanigans immediately. The phrase “over my dead body” comes to my mind. But these parents tried to figure out how they could help their young son. They met with the head of the physics department at the local university. Dr. Ronald Phaneuf agreed to mentor young Taylor. He quickly recognized that Taylor experimenting with nuclear fusion in a garage was a bad idea. In his words: “Oh, my Lord, we can’t let him do that.” Dr. Phaneuf cleared a corner of his physics lab for Taylor. He introduced him to other professors and technicians. And Taylor got to work building his nuclear fusion reactor.

Throughout his first year at the university, Taylor learned and applied knowledge from more than twenty technical fields, including nuclear and plasma physics, chemistry, radiation metrology, and electrical engineering. He began to test-assemble the reactor, troubleshooting vacuum leaks, electrical problems, and an intermittent plasma field. Shortly after his 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, Taylor Wilson loaded deuterium fuel in his machine, brought up the power, and confirmed the presence of neutrons. With that, he became the 32<sup>nd</sup> person on the planet to achieve a nuclear-fusion reaction, and by far the youngest. Not bad for a 14 year old.

I love that story about Taylor Wilson.  
 When I read it, I had to read it to my wife while she was trying to cook dinner.  
 It’s compelling...it grabs me...it surprises me...  
 like all good poetry...like all good stories...like Jesus’ parables.  
 It is stock full of qualities that I see when God is at work:  
 love...trust...commitment...risk-taking...courage...hope...family...community...hard  
 work...knowledge...service...amazement...new life.  
 It is mind-boggling...life expanding...spirit giving.  
 The kingdom of God is here.  
 Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.  
 Mustard seeds...I see ‘em.  
 Yeast...I smell it.  
 Treasures in a fields, pearls of great price, nets full of fish.  
 Yep, yep, yep, God is at work.