

The Parables and Teaching of Jesus
The Kingdom of God
Matthew 13:1-9, 13-23, 44-46

Well, let me say good morning to all of you again, and to ask you to remain standing to read God's Word in just a moment or two. Our children who are going to be entrusted into the care of their good caregivers, are going to go off to the left and receive education there. Let me underscore that we are having, in my view, a very special night tonight. And that is the Convocation for Briarwood Christian School. This church, you know, is a church on a hill. People come here, but we also go out into the world. This is one of the ways of God in the world. I am going to give a message that is for educators, but I hope also for everyone. So we hope to see you tonight.

And now God's word Matthew 13. If you've been here for a while, you know that we did a series, called scenes from the Life of Jesus. They were the history of Jesus life from now, you know, December till May. And then we're going to look for a while at the teachings of Jesus above on the parables.

The Parable of the Sower

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, ⁶ but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ He who has ears,^[a] let him hear."

The Parable of the Sower Explained

¹⁸ "Hear then the parable of the sower: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.^[b] ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure

⁴⁴ “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value

⁴⁵ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, ⁴⁶ who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

And the first of those is the cluster found in Matthew chapter 13. Parables of the Kingdom. If you like to know what's coming... I'm going to say this -- Jesus brings a kingdom. It doesn't just come saying I bring salvation. He doesn't simply bring a church. He's a king. He brings a kingdom. And it looks modest and weak. Often it's like a seed and seeds are easily ignored, easily trampled. Jesus says his kingdom comes like a seed, but it also grows and exceeds all expectations, has a great climax. It's worth all that we have which is brought his life, and it gives meaning to all of life. Matthew chapter 13, verses one and following, and then verses 18 and 44.

Let's pray just for one moment again.

Lord, give us we do pray even as you say ears to hear what you're saying to us. Even now we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Please be seated.

According to recent surveys, half of all teenagers feel anxious or severely anxious up to half the time. And about a quarter feel depressed frequently, fairly frequently, or all the time. Same numbers are true of college students. Young adults. Lesser numbers for older adults. But anxiety and depression are sweeping the land. People study and ask the question why? One great scholar of our age named Jonathan Hite, scientist, sociologist, observer of culture, says out of great conviction, the cause is all the time we spend on screens and social media, comparing our lives to the lives of others, of curated their wonderful experiences and spread them. And now we feel inferior. So we're anxious about our lives. Another man, Arthur Brooks, who is a Catholic Christian and also studies the same things. He's sometimes known as a scholar of the scholar of happiness, says that's true regarding screens and social media. But there is more to it, and the more to it he finds is that people no longer believe that life is meaningful. They believe that the events that they see around them are chaotic and random, without any thread, without any significance in their life, is caught up in events that have no value, no coherent story emerging from them, and therefore they don't know if they have any goals in life or if they would, would they have any chance to fulfill them. People don't have goals. They don't think their life has meaning. That's what Dr. Brooks says. Studies and surveys that show in the 60s and 70s, two out of three college students went to school to college, in part hoping to find a meaning for their lives, and that that number has gone down and down and down for 50 plus years. And now

maybe 20% hope to find a meaning for life that Brooks says is the core, the root of our loss of joy and significance in life.

Now Jesus comes proclaiming a kingdom. And what he says, among other things, is that I come to us as King, and you can have meaning in your life if you belong to me, because then you become a servant of the great king and a part of a great cause. The kingdom of God. That's the message of Matthew chapter 13. Now the passage begins with three short words that we could easily pass over. The words are **that same day**, Jesus talks about the kingdom of God on a day when other things happened, and that day is described in Matthew chapter 12, in the middle of the chapter, some people bring a man who was blind and mute because of demonic influences, and they bring him to Jesus and he touches him and he's healed on the spot immediately. And a discussion comes up because earlier in the day, earlier that same day, Jesus had been walking through some fields and had let his disciples harvest some grain from the edge of the field, grabbed some heads of grain that were hanging over the road, which was legal in the law of the day. But because it was the Sabbath day, they said, oh, he's a Sabbath breaker, lets his disciples break the Sabbath. There they're harvesting and threshing and preparing food is against the law. So he's a law breaker. Therefore, his supernatural powers must come from the evil one because he breaks the Sabbath. He's not a good man. So Jesus heals this man, and they ascribe it to the forces of evil. And then a little bit later that same day, some of those same leaders who are accusing Jesus walked up to him and said, teacher, give us a sign. And you think, what is it that you want? I just gave you a sign and you said it was satanic. What could possibly persuade you now to believe in me? That's the day when Jesus describes his kingdom. A hard day, a day when the disciples must have been asking questions like, why did the leaders of my own people reject?

The man is so obviously the Messiah. How can I make sense of this day? And Jesus says, the kingdom of God comes like a seed, doesn't come like a conquering army; doesn't come with fighter bombers; It doesn't come with armadas of tanks. It comes like a seed. It comes in weakness and softness. Falling on to soil could be easily snatched away. That's how it comes. But don't despair, because when it does come and take root, the harvest is astonishing. Now Jesus does describe something that sounds a little bit strange to us. It says there's a farmer who goes out to sow a seed, and he shows it all over the place indiscriminately and in places we wouldn't expect on a path or a road. It's sometimes translated and in a cluster of thorns and on very thin, rocky soil. Why would he do that? Well, in those days, believe it or not, people did that. The path or the way. The road was simply a path. People walked around and they decided it's not paved with concrete or cement or anything like that. It's just a dirt path. And the farmer's reclaiming his path. And so he's going to dig it up and he's going to kill all the soil, and there's a patch of thorns and weeds, and he's going to try to reclaim that. And so he sow seeds there and also on some rocky soil is going to dig it all up. And so he, he cast the seed first. But as you can imagine, it doesn't work perfectly. Jesus describes it to us. He says, well, you know that the seed that fell on the path that was quickly trampled and it had no purchase, no fruit. Birds quickly devoured the seed. And then that seed that was scattered on thin soil, it sent down

roots, but it hit the rock. And so the roots are very thin. And when the wind, when the sun came, it withered the roots and the plants died. And then there were seeds that were thrown among thorns. And maybe the farmer hoped for good. But the thorns are well established, and you don't just uproot them, and they have their seeds too. And that seed also bore little fruit.

But on the other hand, some seed bore 100 or 60 or 30 times. Now, we don't have a great number of farmers here today. A farmer would not be all that impressed. But we've had centuries of advances in agriculture, and in those days people would have been blown away by a harvest of 60 or 100 or 30 times. Sometimes there's more fruit than you expect, a garden a little bit, and I've planted tomatoes. Anybody who knows anything about tomatoes, knows they deplete the soil a little bit. And so the first year you plant tomatoes is often the very best year. I had a cherry tomato plant that bore for a couple of weeks, 50 tomatoes per day. Isn't that amazing? You never know. A few years later I'm getting three a day. You can't tell what's going to happen when you plant seeds. That's what Jesus is saying.

Now, if you were one of the crowds not really listening all that closely and not everybody listens closely. We've all been in that place where we're we find ourselves in a lecture about things or talk about things we have no interest in. And you, you kind of fade in and out and you don't really take much to heart. If that's the case, you might just take from Jesus teaching a moral lesson. The moral lesson goes like this. Sometimes things work out and sometimes they don't. Sometimes things grow and prosper, sometimes they don't. If you're a sales person, you might have had the experience of making 50 calls and having no sales, and you're very depressed. The next day you make three calls. You make two sales, big sales. You never know. Sometimes the fruit's there, sometimes it isn't.

My life as a professor, I give out grades. And sometimes people tell me, you know, you gave me a B-minus on that test five years ago. Ten years ago? I heard that just two days ago, someone still wounded about a B plus B minus. And I felt like saying, you know, the truth is, for me, a B minus is actually a C plus. And I was in a good mood, so you should be glad for a B minus. I didn't say that, but he felt that he'd studied a long time and he only got a B minus. It just didn't work out. But then sometimes you turn around, next day you study two hours on a harder test and somehow you get an A-plus. You never can tell what's going to happen. That's the super true but superficial moral lesson.

And then the disciples who've never heard parables before, essentially, Jesus invented the parable. And so when the disciples hear the parables as familiar as they are to us, they said, Jesus, what are you doing? Please explain what you're doing. What does this mean? So he says, okay, I'll tell you what it means. It means that the sower went out to sow and I'm the sower.

He says, the Son of Man. That's his favorite title for himself. The Son of Man goes out to scatter seed. He says, today I am doing what the parable suggests. I'm scattering the seed. And if you're wondering why I perform miracles and there's hostility, and in my word and my deeds have no purchase whatsoever. If you're wondering why, the answer is because evil and Satan are active

in this world, and sometimes the word is tossed onto hard, rocky soil and birds come and snatch it away and it has no value at all. And sometimes people take superficial interest, like that seed that fell on the rock, rocky places within soil. And they're interested for a while, and there's a little bit of joy or enthusiasm. They kind of like what they heard, but they quickly fade. And then there are others. There are others who, have an interest, but they have other interests. They're interested in the things of God. They're interested in wealth and success, and those interests choke out the word. And then there are others. The fruit will start to show. Now, of course, we can walk through this just a little bit more. There are deaf listeners Jesus describes in verses 18 and 19, their hearts are as hard as stone. Let me listen a little from time to time. But they're careless. They're indifferent. They hear a thread or a snatch of an idea, and then they start thinking about, can I pull out my cell phone? Will anybody notice if I'm answering a few emails? And then they listen a little bit, and then they start thinking about what they're going to do for lunch. And then they listen a little bit and, and then there's just, there's nothing happens. They get maybe a, a fragment or a thread here and there, but there is there is no fruit. The word makes a tiny faint impression. Everything slips away.

I read a book that accidentally illustrates this a number of years ago. It's a book of all things about punctuation and it's titled Eat Shoots and Leaves. Some of you have read it. I can tell by the smiles. The sign was put out by the London Zoo when they had a panda bear exhibit, and somebody put out a sign for the exhibit. This is what actually happened. And what they should have written was pandas eat shoots and leaves. That's what they eat. That needs no punctuation. Pandas eats, shoots and leaves. But somebody decided there were some commas missing, and they put each comma, shoots comma and leaves, which means we have surly pandas. And after they eat, they're dissatisfied with the taste. And so they pull out a pistol, shoot the place up, and run away. They eat, shoot and leave. 😊 And a woman who was a grammarian writing a book about punctuation, decided to take this as the kick off for her book. It was an interesting book. I think the title helped a lot, and it became something of a bestseller. And so she was, you know, signing books, a stack of books one day, and people are thanking her, and, and someone came up a rather, as she tells it, bedraggled, unhappy looking woman. And she looks at the pile of books about punctuation. She says, you know, I'm so embarrassed. I really don't know. I used to know where to put commas and semicolons and I just don't know. And I'm so embarrassed about it. And I teach English sometime. I really, I really ought to know these things. And, and the author said, well, then this is the book for you. And to whom can I sign the book? And she said, no, no, I really mean it. I really don't know where to put commas. And I wish, I wish someone could help me, but there's nowhere to turn. And there are 800 books about commas sitting right there. And she's acting as if the woman has said, get away from me. I can't help you with commas.

Some people, the author said, can't be helped or they won't be helped. And there are people in the world who say, I wish God would speak to me if only God would speak to me. And then the Christians say, well, you know, God actually did something better. He came into this world in the

person of his son, and he lived the life and he taught, and he healed, and he made disciples and told them to remember what he said and said, the spirit will help you remember, but you try to and they almost certainly took notes, and they carefully wrote down what he said. And after his death and his resurrection, they wrote it all up, and they wrote it in the most common language of the day. They wrote it in Greek. And it's easy to translate. We've translated into every language in the world practically. And so you can get a copy for yourself and you can buy it. It's not kept in a rare library. You can have one and you can read it anytime you want. And people say, but I wish God would speak to me. And we say, and he has. But you have to want to pick up the book. You have to want to receive what's just been handed to you. There's some people who won't be helped. And then there are other people who listen with enthusiasm. They're superficial listeners. They're joyful for a little bit, but they quickly fall away. They think, I'm so glad I heard this. I'm just overwhelmed with what I heard today, and I want to be part of it. Thank you for inviting me to your Bible study. I experienced this occasionally. It probably won't happen today, but most Sunday someone will come up to me and say, this is. I'm not trying to brag, I'm just describing what happens most Sunday. Someone will come up to me and say something like, that's the best sermon I've heard in, you know, 2024. And I have learned over the years that when somebody says, this is the best sermon I've heard this year, it's probably the only sermon they've heard this year, and it's probably both the best and the worst sermon they heard that year. They're very excited. Oh, I came to church today. It's like, I've been told that attendance surges in the first two Sundays of January. Then why is that? Well, because people make New Year's resolutions to start going to church, just like the gym surges, right? And churches surge, at least in the South. That may not be true in Connecticut, but it's true here, and people are very glad. And then. And then they fall away.

And then, of course, there's another kind. Of response. It's the person who likes church for a while or likes what they hear for a while, and then they hear a little bit more and they say, I'm not quite so fond of that. The verb that's translated falls away can be translated also. It's one of those words with several meanings can mean stumble or to be offended, to stumble because of offense. And one of my friends, one of my academic friends, Bob Yarborough, by name, wrote this about people taking offense at what they hear from the Bible. He said many people expect the church to be a safe place where people enjoy unconditional acceptance, where they can be themselves without fear of judgment from anyone in these self-esteem cultures. Pastoral rebuke, he says, seems paradoxical and unwelcome. But since God is holy and we are not, the disparity must be addressed. I think that's right. I think people do find it offensive when the Word of God says, God loves you, but your life doesn't align with his good will and his good character. And of course, beyond that, the life of faith becomes difficult. And some people think, well, if I give my life to Jesus, God will take care of me. He's on my side and all will be well. Jesus says explicitly, almost from the beginning. He says, listen, if you're my disciple, you need to expect the same kind of opposition, the same kind of hatred on my name's sake. Talk to a scholar also about the life of scholarship this week. And he told me we were talking on the phone. He said, by the way, Dan, you might be interested to know that my introduction to the

literature of the New Testament, written from an orthodox, biblical evangelical perspective, my book came out in Farsi this week. Now, I don't know what you know about Farsi, but Farsi sounds a lot like Persian. In other words, it came out in Iran this week. That's because the church in Iran is growing, church in Iran is growing, church in Iraq is growing. The church in China's growing. It's not always easy to be a Christian. Don't be offended. Don't be shocked if, as the church grows in a communist, atheist or Muslim or Hindu place, don't be shocked if there's opposition.

Jesus says, and don't fall away. Don't be offended to follow me as King is to follow me. In a world where there are other kings and other loyalties, don't fall away. Don't be superficial. When you sign up for Jesus, know what you're getting a king, a kingdom, and a course that will be opposed. Then there are distracted listeners. Distracted listeners are those who hear the Word of God and those thorns grow up and they're truly interesting. The Bible doesn't make it entirely clear whether this person is a believer who bears little fruit or an unbeliever. There's a little debate about it. Certainly there are people who are Christians who say, Lord, you're my savior, my King, but they're so busy seeking success and wealth in a name and progress in rank that they have very little time left over for the Lord. So of course, Jesus is the sower and I'm standing in his place right now. And you're kind of like, you're kind of like the people who heard Jesus a long time ago. Jesus is still speaking. He's still sowing the word. And so the question must go out. And you've probably heard it before, because it's a really good question.

The question is, what kind of soil are you? Are you here even though you don't really care all that much? Somebody dragged you here today. We're kind of glad somebody dragged you here. We hope that, however, you are not simply someone who ignores the Word of God. I hope we hope. We pray that something sticks. Are you a distracted listener or are you a superficial listener? Are you the kind of person who's interested in the things of God, but also very interested in career? Or are you the kind of person who will bear fruit by God's grace, 160 and 30 times exceeding all expectations? Of course, I hope that you are, and I know that most of you, the great majority of you, are. And if so, then you could pray or think or think and pray. Lord, I want to be fruitful. You show me, Lord, how I can bear fruit for you. Give me confidence in what you're doing in my life. If I can just give a sidebar. This means, of course, when we say that Jesus is not just a Savior, he's also King. When we say he's king, we mean that he reigns or rules or guides everything you do.

One of the things that I find interesting when I talk to people is if I ask them, what do you do for a living? They often say, I just, and then they describe what they do. And sometimes people say things like, well, I'm just a stay at home mom. And I say, can I just give you another phrase for that? Can I offer you this label? You're a ***Polytropic Juvenile Rejuvenation Human Resource Development Specialist***. Now, in case you're wondering what that means, polytropic means in many places and in many ways. Polytropic Juvenile is the longest word I can think of for little people. And then human resources development specialist goes without explanation. If you're staying at home with a one-year-old and a three year old and a seven year old, you can do that

for the King. These people will live forever, and there's no telling what they're going to do over the next 80 years. Don't say I just say I serve the king with these little ones. Or in mining or architecture or sales or entertainment or news or media. This world needs people who do it for the King, because there's plenty of people who are doing it for other reasons. You serve a king. This can happen spontaneously or non-spontaneously. That is to say, fruit is often a spontaneous development from a healthy seed. On the other hand, it also takes cultivation. Let me let me say it this way.

A few weeks ago I was in Colorado with my family, by which I mean my wife and children and grandchildren. And for various reasons. We often went to our hikes together in cars, and I frequently was with my two and a half year old granddaughter, Gwen, who loves to sing. But she doesn't just love to sing, she loves to sing and make relentless eye contact while she sings. Just so she's just staring and smiling the whole time. And we're sitting in the back seat and she says, let's sing. What do you want to sing, old MacDonald? Old MacDonald had a farm, E-i-e-i-o. And on that farm he had a cow. You want to sing with me? No. And so it's fun. And she's making eye contact. And then we're done with that. Okay. What do you want to sing next? We want to. I want to sing bingo. B-i-n-g-o. They sound kind of the same, I think those two songs. And then what are you gonna sing? We're going to sing Jesus Loves Me, Jesus loves me. This I know, and we sing in the back seat, make eye contact, and it just pours out of her spontaneously because she loves music and she loves Nana and Papa, and it just comes out of her.

And I'm thinking about the spontaneity of life. And then I think about the people riding in the car, and I think about how many degrees there are in this car and how many certificates of outstanding something or other. After extensive training. There's a lot of preparation in this car. There's a lot of cultivation, and sometimes it's just spontaneous and it flows out of you, and sometimes it's anything but spontaneous.

Sometimes you're trained long and hard. Can I just say on Wednesday nights this fall, if you want to learn how to get more out of God's Word, I will train you, and you will work, and you will read books, and you will grow in skill if you come in and all. Olan Stubbs is going to teach you about discipleship this fall, also on Wednesday nights. And the fruit that we bear is spontaneous, but also training helps. Training helps. The Word of God bears fruit spontaneously, and it also bears fruit with effort. But it's always gentle. Once in a while, once in a while, it's a place to shout. I've had students who want to make a big point in class, and they think the way to do it is to say Dr. Doriani...What I believe is this and their classmates kind of cringe. Usually because the word of God doesn't usually come with shouting and battering rams and carrying on and demanding once in a while. It does usually comes gently, non-coercively God works quietly in our hearts.

So the question, of course, is what kind of soil are you? How are you bearing fruit? Now, this all sounds like maybe we're being a little bit pessimistic about the hopes of the kingdom could sound that way. And so Jesus tells a series of very short and optimistic parables that follow, and I'm going to comment on for them just very quickly. The first one is the parable, the Mustard

seed. And in it Jesus says, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed and a mustard seed is the smallest of all the garden seeds that you know. But it is a good seed. And mustard plants give us, you know, mustard, and they grow to be 6ft or 8ft once in a great while. If everything's perfect, 10 or 12ft. Jesus says, yeah, but. The seed of the kingdom is like a mustard seed that doesn't grow to be four, six, eight, ten, 12ft. It grows to be a mighty tree. And the birds multiple bird's nest in the branches of the great tree seeds, all expectations and the kingdom of life. The kingdom of heaven is like is like leaven that a woman took and hid into a loaf of bread. The numbers Jesus uses are like 100 pounds of meals. It's a lot of big loaves and it changes everything.

That's what the gospel does, you know, changes everything. Do you know that the most literate society in the ancient world was Israel by a mile, because they had something to read? When the Reformation came and the Gospels rediscovered and the Bible was given back in the hands of the people, the literacy rate in Europe was, depending on who you read, 3 or 4 or 5%. And by the end of the Reformation, you know, a few decades later, the literacy rate had gone up to 25, 28, 30, 33%, because there's something to read and you know that Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, Princeton and a whole bunch of other places were started as schools for pastors to read the word and share the word with their people. The kingdom of God grows and goes through a pervasive influence, but it also grows to an unexpected size. The Kingdom of God is in Persia, Iran, we call it, and Iraq and China and Vietnam. The church is growing in Vietnam and it grew in Jesus own day. You know, no funds, no media centers, no training centers. They lived under constant persecution. Yet somehow, somehow, the Christian community went from 120 people on the day Jesus ascended into heaven to become the most influential religion in the Roman Empire, 300 years later, with no institutional help, no money, constant persecution, the kingdom grew and grew, and it has a pervasive influence in our society that includes schools and businesses. It includes people in the media. And it's worth a lot. Jesus tells two more parables about it. It's worth a lot, he says. The kingdom is like a man who's plowing a field, and he's plowing along and he bumps into a jar and he decides to buy the field. Now, you think that sounds pretty bizarre, but here's what's behind it. Fifth day in Israel, lots of wars occurred. Israel was a land bridge between Africa and Asia. And so a lot of people marched to Israel to fight somebody else. And when distress was coming their way, people would often bury their treasure because there were no banks and safe deposit boxes. We understand them and all they would simply put their wealth in a jar and bury it deep and come back and get it. But they didn't all come back. And so there were jars that were hidden under the surface, and people from time to time would bump into them with a plow. And a folklore emerged. And the folklore was strange but true. If you hit that jar and you lift it out to see what's inside, you have to give it to the owner. But if you decide to take a risk and you hit what sounds like a jar and you don't look, you can buy the field without telling the owner what happened. And so this guy says, hey, I hit a jar and I'm going to buy the field. And he sold everything you had to buy that field. And the idea is that sometimes you find the kingdom of God.

You find your way to the king, King Jesus, without even really looking. You're just living your life and you bump into, a persuasive or morally beautiful Christian, and you start investigating. You sort of stumble and fall your way into the kingdom still worth all you have, even if you found out by accident. Maybe that is some of you.

But the second parable he tells is about a pearl merchant who goes around collecting pearls and other valuable things, maybe gold and silver and other precious stones. And this man knows pearls. He knows fine things and beautiful things, and he sees one pearl, and he says everything that I have does not match the value of this one great pearl. So I'm going to sell everything I have to buy this pearl of great value. Now, this represents the person who's looking, the person who investigates atheism and communism and Hinduism and Buddhism and Islam. And other forms of religion. He searches them out in ways that when it comes to Christianity, or she comes to Christianity and says it's the best, it's worth all that I have. And when I own Christ as my own, as my Savior, my Lord, then I'm not just receiving him as Savior. I'm receiving him as my King through all of life. All of life.

Now, if you come to this church, you know, it's kind of a city on a hill and you come here, but you have to know that this church people come in here to get strong for their faith, but they also go out. And this is a church with a lot of in and out. For example, you may or may not know that we have a ballet ministry. Why would a church have a ballet ministry? Well, one reason is that little girls like to dance, and so you invite them into the church, and they're three and they're four and they're 16 when it's all done, or 17 when it's all done, and you get to talk to them and train them to dance, but you also get to talk to them about the beauty of their bodies in an age when there's so much confusion about bodies and so many girls and teenage girls and older girls and women have problems with body dysphoria, and we get to train hundreds of girls. Some of them come from this church. Most of them don't because Jesus is king over dance. And we have a business leaders ministry for men and women, and we do that because we believe that if you belong to the King, the King has something to say to our work life, and we can make a difference in our corner of the world with whatever authority and whatever influence God's given us, we can serve the King at work tonight, we'll celebrate serving the King through education. We serve a king. Jesus is priest. We talk about him as priest most of the time here. That is to say, he is the priest who gave his life as a sacrifice for sins. That's his priestly work. And he's a prophet. He teaches, but he is a king. He reigns over all of life. And when you come to this church, whether you've been coming for a long time or a little while, you have to know what you're doing. You're coming in to go out.

We're like a giant accordion or a concertina, if you know what that is. And we come in and out, the air comes in and the air goes out. We go out into the world doing whatever the Lord has for us to do in this broad and beautiful world. The church is important. Don't misunderstand.

The church is a school for the kingdom. We learn about the kingdom and this and the church is a hospital for the kingdom. If you're broken and weary, come here and we'll take care of you. The church is a school. The church is a hospital. The church is the vanguard for the kingdom. It's

the concentration point. It's the tip of the spear. It's that. It's the beavers or the duck swimming across the lake. And it's where the ripples start. But the ripples do start. The church is many things, but the church is not the kingdom. God's work. God's world is bigger than the church. We come to the church to go out into the world to serve the King. And that my friends, will keep you from being depressed and anxious because you're not looking inward at yourself.

You're looking outward into the world in a great cause and a great Lord who gives you great things to do. Serving the great one.

Let's pray.

Father, I do thank you for teaching us, Lord Jesus, in stories that kind of stick and rest in our minds, that remind us of who we are and who you are and give us confidence that if we've given ourselves to you, we have become part of something vastly bigger than ourselves in our interests. All of life is yours. Our bodies our food our jokes our athletics our gender our engineering or farming or construction or football or medicine... Lord, we pray that we would be little accordions coming together, going out, breathing out words of life for us one by one, and for us as members of a great kingdom.

We pray in your name.

Amen.