

July 15-19, 2024 Edition

# Following The Year<sub>(s)</sub> Of <sup>^</sup>Jesus Part 133

## Cultivating Kingdom Hearts

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

\*\*\* These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

\*\*\*\* Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside](https://www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside)). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

**Monday Reflection:** This week we are going to spend talking about the importance of cultivating a kingdom heart. We are also going to look at HOW to cultivate a kingdom heart. But first let's talk a little about the kingdom of God since that's what these parables are- descriptions of God's kingdom.

Generally when we think of a "kingdom" (or in modern America a "nation") we think of a geographical location with borders, an army, an economy and so on. And that's certainly what the Jews were expecting. But it's not what Jesus came to establish. His kingdom as it turns out is not from around here:

"My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world." Pilate said, "So you are a king?" Jesus responded, "You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true." "What is truth?" Pilate asked. Jon 18:26-38 (NLT)

And Pilate wasn't the first one to misunderstand Jesus. Maybe that's why He talked about it so much:

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Matthew 4:17 (NIV)

Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. Matthew 4:23 (NLT)

Some of the Pharisees asked Jesus, "When will the kingdom of God come?" Jesus answered, "God's kingdom is coming, but not in a way that you will be able to see with your eyes. People will not say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' because God's kingdom is within you." Luke 17:20-21 (NCV)

Jesus' kingdom isn't of-this-world but then again- it is. Why? How? Because according to Jesus, His kingdom resides in the hearts of those who have made Him their King. It's a really confusing concept and thankfully we don't have to have our brains fully wrapped around this concept in order to cultivate kingdom hearts.

One of the ways Jesus tried to get His followers (and us) to understand the kingdom of God was by telling stories about it. Analogies or parables that would allow us to compare the kingdom to things we know about. One of the things people knew about in the first century was farming. So Jesus told them this story:

"Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." Matthew 13:3-9 (NLT)

Why not spend today reflecting on what you think the kingdom-of-God is. What isn't it? And what does it mean to be a subject of God's kingdom?

**Tuesday Reflection:** So yesterday we began looking at what it might take to cultivate kingdom hearts. We read through a few verses about God's kingdom and then finished up looking at one of the parables-of-the-kingdom. Today we're going to start looking at a few observations about God's kingdom and the parable of the farmer (sower) and the seeds.

The first thing that strikes me when I read this parable is how Jesus begins. He simply says "listen". That's interesting to me. I wonder why He started it this way. I might think that maybe James and John were cutting up in the back and making noise and so Jesus called them to attention if it weren't for the fact that He ends this story saying:

Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." Matthew 13:9 (NLT)

No, something is going on here and it revolves around the act of listening. So what is it? Why does He do that? Well it's not the only time He uses this phrase. In Matthew chapter 11 He uses the exact same phrase when talking about John the Baptist:

Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand! Matthew 11:15 (NLT)

And in the book of Revelation He uses this phrase 7 different times while dictating letters to the 7 churches of Asia Minor:

Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. Revelation 2:7 (NLT)

Have you ever read those letter in Revelation chapters 2 & 3? A couple of them are pretty good (for the people He sending the letters to). But a couple are kind of scary. He tells the churches in Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis & Laodicea what exactly they're doing wrong. He warns them in pretty stark terms but He still calls them "the church". What does that mean?

Well for me that tells me that the kingdom is for listeners. If you're a fan of the old movie Glengarry Glen Ross then you are probably familiar with the phrase, "coffee is for closers". Well, any of us who are followers of Jesus should become familiar with the phrase, "the kingdom is for listeners." Turns out that's the only requirement for entrance into His kingdom- being willing to listen.

I mean, sure there are other things He asks us to do and more than a few that He will ask us not to do but as long as we have ears to hear and we listen and understand what the Spirit is saying to us then even when we get WAY off track He still calls us His children/ subjects/brothers/sisters. I don't know about you but I'm EXTREMELY grateful for that. Turns out the kingdom isn't for the rich or the powerful or the successful or the talented or the popular. I mean, they're all invited but even for those of us who aren't "included" in any of the categories the world typically rewards- we're invited too.

And all we have to do is be willing to listen.

There's a story in the Old Testament about a boy named Samuel. His mother couldn't have children and in that day and culture that was a HUGE deal. So Hannah went to the

Tabernacle of the Lord and prayed that God would give her a son. She promised that if God granted her request she would dedicate the boy to becoming a man of God. Hannah got pregnant and had a baby boy that she named Samuel. When he was old enough she took him to the Tabernacle of the Lord and gave him over to the care and instruction of Eli- the priest of God.

The first night Samuel was at the Tabernacle he was trying to sleep (next to the Ark Of The Covenant if you can fathom that!) and he heard his name being called. Thinking it was Eli calling for him Samuel jumped up and ran into his room to see what he needed. "I didn't call for you, go back to bed," Eli said. This happened twice more. On the third time Eli finally figured it out:

So the Lord called a third time, and once more Samuel got up and went to Eli. "Here I am. Did you call me?" Then Eli realized it was the Lord who was calling the boy. So he said to Samuel, "Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went back to bed. *1 Samuel 3:8-9 (NLT)*

Can you imagine trying to get to sleep after that???? But Samuel at least went and reclined on his bed (I'm never sure what the correct grammar is whether it's "laid down" or "lay down" or "lie down" so I generally just find another way to write it ;o) and then this happened:

And the Lord came and called as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel replied, "Speak, your servant is listening." *1 Samuel 3:10 (NLT)*

And God began speaking to Samuel. It was a conversation that God would carry on with Samuel for the rest of his life. And what was required of Samuel? Just listening. That's it. I mean following through, yes but isn't that inherent in listening? Anyone can "hear" what God says but not many actually listen.

So today maybe get used to getting quiet and praying Samuel's prayer: Speak Lord, your servant is listening.

**Wednesday Reflection:** For Jesus, humility is the key- which is a huge problem... not just because humility is not something that comes naturally to us humans but also because the word, "humble/humility" is used in so many different contexts in the English language that we misunderstand it most of the time. In fact, Ben Franklin said that humility was the most difficult virtue for him to grow in. Why? Because we're told to be proud of our accomplishments, or proud of our children or our spouse. Then we're told that the opposite of humility is pride. In fact the Bible says over and over that being "proud" makes us opponents of God. He promises to do everything in His power to rid us of that horrible anti-virtue.

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." *James 4:6 (NLT)*

Huh? How can I be proud of my accomplishments or kids without having God come against me as an opponent? Well, the answer lies in the correct translation of the word for pride- "arrogance". God is actually opposed to the arrogant. Why the English translations of the Bible chose to keep translating that word as "pride" I will never know.

So what is true humility? It is simply letting God set the pace, direction and timing of your life. I know what you're thinking, "simply" letting Him set those things? That's anything but simple. Yes. But at least we're working with the proper definition now. That's the invitation of the Kingdom of God... come become humble. Jesus put it this way in Matthew chapter 20:

You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:25-28 (NLT)

Among you it will be different. Among us (Jesus' people... people in His Kingdom) leaders will not be made by becoming really good at getting people to listen to them but by learning to listen themselves. It's how Jesus advanced His Kingdom while He was on this earth and it's how His Kingdom still advances today... at least that's how it's supposed to advance. With people who are learning humility and letting Jesus set the pace, direction and timing of their lives while they invite people to do the same thing.

It's the complete opposite of the way our world works (hmmm... "works" might be a poor choice of words because from my vantage point it's not really "working" very well). But in His story of the four soils (The Farmer and the Seeds) Jesus paints a very different picture. He talks about a Kingdom that comes in very gently... like a seed falling on the ground. The only difference in what happens to the seed has to do with the soil. In all four instances the Farmer is the same, the seed is the same, but the soils are all very different.

The soil that provides the best growth conditions for the seed is changed... but not in the way a plough changes the field (with force and violence... you know... like a typical kingdom of this earth). The seed changes the field slowly, gradually, from the inside out. I spent some time thinking about that concept this week and what has totally stuck in my mind is this:

The Kingdom of God does NOT come in like a wrecking ball (for those of you up with pop culture... you've got a tune and a mental picture stuck in your mind now that will not go away easily... sorry... or you're welcome depending on what you think of that song ;o)

Every other kingdom on earth comes in like a wrecking ball. It strikes with force and violence to impose its will on people. But not Jesus. He doesn't come in like a wrecking ball. He comes in like... well, like a seed. Whether that seed has any impact on your life totally depends on you and your willingness to listen and understand (or not...). Why does He do it that way? Because it's just Who He Is. He couldn't do it any other way because if He did He would be going against His very nature. He wants us to listen... to let the seed grow... and then take on His nature. A nature of humility.

Don't be selfish... Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Philippians 2:3-5 (NLT)

As it turns out, Jesus' greatest hope is that you will choose to become more like Him. Are you listening?

**Thursday Reflection:** This week's lesson started formulating in my brain on January 23, 2020 as I sat atop Mount Arbel in Israel. My tour group was sitting on the top of this ancient fortress mount looking out over the Sea of Galilee out towards Capernaum and Michael Card was talking about the strange relationship between freedom and becoming a servant to Jesus. He sang a song called "A Better Freedom" that really struck me- especially the first verse and the chorus:

Christ revealed Himself to me ~ Enslaved my heart to set me free  
I was bound to at Him at Calvary ~ And found a better freedom

That Soul who suffered in the dark ~ Has purchased and unchained my heart  
A shining slavery did impart ~ To find a better freedom

A better freedom can't be found ~ By those unwilling to be bound  
A better freedom is not known ~ By those whose hearts will not be owned  
But those who follow find a better freedom

You can google the song with Michael's name and find YouTube videos of him singing the whole thing. I remember listening to him and being struck by the idea that we as followers of Jesus are freed when our hearts are enslaved by Him. That He could somehow impart a "shining slavery" by unchaining my heart. Then the chorus- I mean his turn of phrase really made me think. A better freedom can't be found by those unwilling to be bound? Huh? A better freedom is not known by those whose hearts will not be owned? What the heck does that mean?

After he was done he invited all of us to just sit quietly in that beautiful place and "wait on the Lord". Just be with God in this beautiful place and if He speaks, great. If not that's ok too. So I sat and looked around. I was fine to sit quietly but my mind spins constantly (and not always with lofty spiritual stuff- just as often [or maybe more often if I'm honest] my mind is consumed with what I'm going to have for dinner or what that weird rock on the ground at my feet is?) but truth be told I wasn't sure it was going to lead to much in my heart.

Then I looked closer at the rock I just mentioned that was on the ground by my feet. I had to dig it out a bit but when I did I realized it was in the shape of a heart. Huh. Michael had just been talking about our hearts and this strange relationship between freedom and slavery in the life of a Christian. Then I looked back down and saw that the rock had come out of the ground in a spot where a thorn bush was growing. That kind of reminded me of the story of the farmer (or sower if you're old like me) and the seeds. I remembered Jesus talked about how the farmer casts his seed on 4 different kinds of soil (that we find out later are 4 different conditions of the human- you guessed it- HEART!). Then I looked up at the Sea of Galilee and looked at Capernaum and I thought, huh- that's where Jesus was when He told the story of the farmer and the seeds. I thought that was pretty cool.

Then I looked to my right and saw a rock with plants growing out of it. Farmer and the seeds again, right? I looked a little further and noticed a footpath and then I noticed a field of onions (Israel has these wild onions that look suspiciously like daffodils without the blooms) thriving amongst the thorns and the rocks and the footpath. I realized from

where I was sitting I could see all 4 of the different types of soil that Jesus mentioned in His story.

At that moment I realized that just maybe God was using my easily distracted mind to talk to me about something I had always struggled with at least a little bit- the story of the sower (or the farmer if you're younger than me ;o) and the seeds. Not that I haven't thought about it or even preached on it. In fact this story was the text of my very first sermon when I was about 10 years old at the South Hills Church of Christ in West Covina California on a Sunday night. I don't remember what I said about it way back then but I do remember that as a preacher here at Riverside over the last 23 years I have often preached from this text but I never felt like I was doing much more than scratching the surface.

At that point I felt like I heard Jesus say, "listen".

So I did. And I've been listening as Jesus speaks to my heart about this story for the last 3 months. I won't say that I feel like I've finally "cracked it" but I think I'm getting a tad deeper when it comes to understanding what this story is all about. And what I am thinking at this point that this story is mostly about I keep coming back to that word, "listen". I mentioned on Monday that I'm starting to think that the only requirement for a follower of Jesus is that he/she be willing to listen. I kind of had the same philosophy when I was a youth minister. I didn't have a ton of rules. Be kind to each other and listen to me when I tell you not to do something you're doing or when I tell you to start doing something you're not doing.

I'm starting to realize that's how God deals with us. Yes the Bible is full of God's directions but we don't have all them memorized when we first come to Jesus. And that's ok- start doing what you already know (or at least THINK you know) about what God wants from you and He'll course correct as you go along.

Tomorrow we'll look at Jesus explanation of the meaning of His parable but for today maybe spend some times asking yourself in what way listening to Jesus frees our hearts even as our hearts are being enslaved. My mind is still spinning.

**Friday Reflection:** So if the kingdom of God is for listeners then what does the meaning of the parable of the farmer and the seeds teach us? Well, for one thing it teaches us that 3 out of the 4 soils (or conditions of the human heart) lead us humans away from Jesus' kingdom rather than into it which is why the condition of our hearts are so important to God:

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

Why? Why guard my heart above all else? Because if you're not developing a humble heart that is willing to listen to your Creator and Savior when you get off track you won't even consider entering the kingdom of God. Which pretty much leads us to the first kind of soil/condition of heart that Jesus describes:

Now listen to the explanation of the parable about the farmer planting seeds: The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom

and don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. Matthew 13:18-19 (NLT)

I always pictured the heart defined by the footpath as evil. Aligned totally AGAINST God's kingdom. But the more I think about it the more I think I've missed the boat on this one. Jesus doesn't say this person is evil- he says this person doesn't understand the message. And remember what the message is- to listen. There are those who are evil whose hearts are akin to a footpath but I don't think that's the only kind of person that doesn't understand the message. For most of my teen years I went to church every Sunday (twice) and Wednesday night but I never really considered letting Jesus have any impact on my life other than my physical location on Sundays (did I mention I went twice every Sunday?) and Wednesday night. I just didn't see the point. Why would I do that? Jesus would just gum things up I reasoned. Forgive my enemies? Do good and pray for those who hurt me. I don't think so. The footpath heart isn't always evil- that kind of heart just doesn't see the point of Jesus. I've been that kind of heart and I've known lots of people in that situation. I believe there's hope for them yet, just like there was for me.

The second kind of heart Jesus describes is represented by soil that has thorn bushes competing with the seed or message of the kingdom (to listen, right?):

The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. Matthew 13:20-21 (NLT)

Who are these people? I think these are the people who buy into the message of the kingdom because they don't really understand what Jesus is offering. These people jump in to the church with both feet but when Jesus doesn't deliver on what they were told Jesus would deliver (often in 21st century American religion we are "sold" on Jesus as the solution to any problems we might be having whether they be physical, financial, relational, emotional or any other problem we might be having). I mean, if Jesus offered to fix every problem you or I or anyone else could ever have who wouldn't jump in with both feet? We kind of talked about this with Job last week. Anyone that sees Jesus that way is just using Him for the shiny stuff they can get from Him. Have you ever known somebody like that? Who only pretended to like or love you until it became evident that they had gotten everything they were going to get out of you and then they bailed? How did that make you feel? Yeah, God too.

But it's not just that God is unwilling to be used by us- it's actually much more complex than that. God knows what happens to humans when we become users- it actually dehumanizes the user much more than it does the person who gets used. God is unwilling to let that happen to any of us. He's not our cosmic Santa Clause. Jesus promises we will still have problems but He also promises we will never have to go through those problems alone.

Never.

The third kind of human heart is represented by a third kind of soil:

The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. Matthew 13:22 (NLT)

What's going on here? Well this person is divided. They feel strongly both ways. They want to keep one foot in God's kingdom and one foot firmly in this world generally tied to either wealth or pleasure or power or success or... well it could be any number of things. The problem with this type of soil/human heart is that it has given in to idolatry- when we give in to this kind of thing we break the first commandment: no other gods before Me.

There's this guy Jesus runs into who is the poster child for this kind of soil/heart:

As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good. But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.'"

"Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young." Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," he told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Mark 10:17-24 (NLT)

Why does Jesus ask him to sell everything he owns? Jesus doesn't do that to all of His rich followers. Why ask this guy to do something He doesn't ask others to do? Because Jesus (unlike you and me) can see into this guy's heart. Jesus knows what's going on in there. Yeah, the rich guy followed most of the commandments but there was a big one he was blowing big time- no other gods before Me.

Money had become an idol for this young man and Jesus knew it. He knew the only cure for this guy was to get rid of that which competed the most in his heart with God Himself. Makes me ask myself, I wonder what Jesus would tell me to get rid of before I come follow Him? What do you think He'd ask you to get rid of? The story goes on:

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!" This amazed them. But Jesus said again, "Dear children, it is very hard to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!" The disciples were astounded. "Then who in the world can be saved?" they asked. Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God." Mark 10:24-27 (NLT)

What's going on here? This kid embodied the rocky soil. The plant grows but it never produces fruit. It looks like wheat but it never fully matures. The same can happen to us if we're not careful. Tomorrow we'll look at the fourth kind of soil/human heart represented in this parable but for today maybe spend some time looking inward and asking yourself if maybe one of the first three kinds of soil/human heart sounds familiar?

**Saturday Reflection:** The fourth kind of soil/human heart that Jesus mentions is the kind He's looking for:

The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God's word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!" Matthew 13:23 (NLT)

What characterizes this kind of soil/heart? A humble heart that's willing to listen. Not a perfect heart (what hope would there be for any of us if that were the case?) but a heart willing to be led. Earlier in the story Jesus give the disciples an attaboy that I imagine stuck with them for the rest of their lives- He told them why the "secrets of kingdom" were available to them and not to others:

He replied, "You are permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others are not. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them. That is why I use these parables, For they look, but they don't really see. They hear, but they don't really listen or understand. This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that says, 'When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend. For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes- so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them. But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn't see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn't hear it. Matthew 13:11-17 (NLT)

Can you imagine Jesus saying those words to you? He does- if you're willing to listen. I used to think the prophecy Jesus quotes from Isaiah was saying God had hardened the hearts of the Jews so that they couldn't and wouldn't listen sort of like I always thought He did to Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. That always bothered me that we are told repeatedly in Exodus that God "hardened Pharaoh's heart so he wouldn't let the Israelites go". I thought that meant Pharaoh had no choice and that seemed pretty mean to me. But one night at Bible study as we discussed this it occurred to us (I LOVE midweek Bible studies because as a community we often arrive at understandings I never could have seen on my own) that the same sun that melts butter, hardens clay. There's even a meme that makes the rounds on Facebook from time to time with that same sentiment.

Suddenly I had a spinning of the kaleidoscope- God wasn't hardening Pharaoh's heart on purpose- it's just that the same God that melted Moses' heart, hardened Pharaoh's. Why? Humility (or the lack thereof). Which is why humility is such an important virtue for us to be cultivating in our lives.

Ok so now back to the Isaiah prophecy- God doesn't harden the Jews' hearts against their will- it's just that the same God that melted Peter's and Andrew's and John's and James' and the rest of the disciples hearts hardened the hearts of most of the religious leaders in

first century Israel. Jesus even says if only they would turn to Me I would heal them. And then He drops this on the disciples:

But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn't see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn't hear it. Matthew 13:11-17 (NLT)

Wow. I know we already read that a few paragraphs ago but that's amazing. The disciples eyes see and their ears, hear. Why? Because they listen. They're FAR from perfect but they are always willing to be corrected. There's this moment at the end of the story of Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 in John chapter 6. The people come back to Jesus the day after He fed them in the wilderness and tell him to feed them again. Jesus says, nope. Why? Because Jesus ALWAYS responds to genuine need (which was why He fed them the day before) but He NEVER responds to demands. And to drive home exactly who was with Him for the long haul rather than just for the food He preaches this freaky sermon about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. It makes sense now because we have read what He said at the Last Supper but for those who heard Him that day along the shores of the Sea of Galilee it made zero sense and it offended them so they left. Well, most of them left:

At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?" Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God." John 6:65-69 (NLT)

Who doesn't leave? The listeners. They don't get it either. It makes zero sense to them. But they've bet everything on this unorthodox Rabbi and they aren't going to let a little thing like misunderstanding get in the way of their faith.

We'd do well to learn a thing or two from them. They still don't understand but they're in. They're committed. How about me? How about you? Are you listening? If you are the message of the kingdom will grow in you and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted. What will that look like in your life? I have no idea. I'm still working out what it looks like in my life. But I'm committed (on my better days). I'm not going to let a little thing like not understanding what's going on in my own life and in the lives of those I love get in my way. Do I always understand what Jesus is up to in this world? Not even close.

But I'm listening. I hope you are too. Let's listen together.