

The kingdom is like...

By [James Sledge](#)

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"The kingdom of heaven is like... The kingdom of heaven is like... The kingdom of heaven is like..." so says Jesus. I wonder if we modern folks wouldn't have gotten frustrated very quickly with Jesus. "Don't tell us what the kingdom is like! What is it?"

A conceit of the modern era is that everything can be explained. We haven't figured it all out yet, but we will. Modern people do not do so well with mystery. (Some argue that post modern folks do better, but that's another discussion.) It's no coincidence that Unitarianism was a modern, Enlightenment undertaking. And while that movement was in part a reaction against wars and violence in Europe that seemed to be driven by competing religious doctrines, it was also a move away from mystery. Its god was high concept: rational, logical, and not engaged in human affairs or natural events.

But I do not mean to pick on Unitarians. Most Trinitarian Christians have God safely secured behind walls of doctrine, logic, and a thoroughly modern, scientific worldview. Even fundamentalists, who may view science as an enemy, see the world and God through this scientific, modern worldview, where truth is about demonstrable facts. (Belief in supernatural "facts" has little to do with embracing mystery.)

Jesus begins his ministry with the proclamation, one shared with John the Baptist, that the Kingdom has come near. Clearly this Kingdom has to figure prominently in the work of the Church, but the Kingdom is like... Its arrival, its actual shape, our place in it, etc. are shrouded in mystery. But we don't care for mystery so we have decided we will turn this thing we cannot fully embrace or understand into something plain, clear, and straightforward: going to heaven when we die. No mystery required at all. Unitarians, Trinitarians, and even those who aren't religious at all are happy to embrace such a notion.

Who in their right mind would start a religious movement around something only partially grasped and hidden in mystery? "The kingdom of heaven is like..." No church consultant would ever let that become a centerpiece of a congregation's life and ministry. So where does mystery live in the Church?

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