

July 26, 2020 Sermon
Matthew 13:31-33; 44-52

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." Again, "the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

"Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

I hope you read through the scripture lesson before you started reading the sermon. If *you* were to describe the kingdom of heaven, *how* would you describe it? Would it start out with grandiose plans or would it start small? Would you be thinking about the kingdom of heaven or would you be thinking about God's kingdom here on earth? Are they the same, or not the same?

I'm sure there are those who might start out by saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like walking through arches of beautiful jewels and streets paved with gold, where every opinion is black and white with no gray areas. (I'm actually hoping the kingdom of heaven is peaceful, where people have stopped their fussing with one another, selfishness and greed are absent, and people simply agree to be kind.)

For Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is *not* compared to kings or principalities, or soldiers of war who attempt to reign over others and *force* them to create a kingdom. No, for Jesus, the kingdom is compared to lots of *small* things; things you may not be able to *see* at first glance because they are *so* minute; things you would never *think* about when thinking about the growth of the kingdom of heaven.

We have all seen mustard seeds. We all know how small they are, and yet, in the area where Jesus traveled and taught, mustard seeds could turn into *huge* trees, big enough to allow birds to sit on their limbs. And the trees were a nuisance. There was nothing *good* about a mustard seed producing *a huge, bushy tree*, and yet, that seed is *worthy* of being compared to the kingdom of heaven.

And let's talk about yeast. What a great thing to talk about during this particular pandemic. I don't know how many people have decided that bread baking should be a thing during this pandemic. Amateur bakers have either *purchased* yeast, or they received a "*start*" from someone that allows them to bake and bake and bake. And these bakers are very creative! I've seen loaves of sourdough, bagels, cinnamon rolls, pizzas made with sourdough crust, and on and on it goes.

Have you ever *seen* a grain of yeast? It's verrrrrry small! It takes a few grains of yeast to make dough rise, but you must be *careful* with it, because you can actually *keep* it from rising if the water is too hot, or too cold. Yeast needs to have just the right conditions, but when it *does*, it grows.

The funny thing about yeast showing up in this gospel lesson is that yeast was seen as something no one wanted in Jesus' time. Yeast was considered *dirty*, or *bad*; something one would leave out of a recipe. Yet, here is Jesus comparing the kingdom to yeast that, when mixed in with three measures of flour, grows.

How about those pearls? The kingdom is like a jeweler in search of the finest of pearls, and when he found that one, beautiful pearl, he *sold* all he had in order to buy it.

Pearls start with a grain of sand, stuck in an oyster. Sand is an irritant, and the oyster has a defense mechanism that coats the grain of sand until it no longer feels like an irritant, and a pearl is created. Something small, and infinitesimal, turned into *a thing* of great beauty.

All of the above, have a lot of things in common for creating the kingdom of God. First of all, they're all small, and seemingly *insignificant* things. These are things we don't think about all the time, and yet, maybe we *should*. If we take a good hard look at how the kingdom is compared, it *may* not seem all that glamorous.

Mustard seeds are tiny and they grow into bushy trees that are nothing but troublesome for the land owner. Yeast is...well...yeast comes from *rotting* things, and yet, it's powerful enough to create food to feed a family. Pearls are made because a grain of sand was bothering a sea creature. These are not *overly* pretty pictures.

The kingdom of heaven starts from *almost* nothing. From what we can see, it has very modest beginnings. The power of the kingdom seems to lie in the almost invisible; those things we *can't see*, or *don't see* because we have overlooked them.

Look at the corona virus. We can't see *it*. And, although you may think it's a bad example, the kingdom of heaven is like a germ from a corona virus that latches on to people and spreads from one person to the next, until finally, most of God's kingdom is praying for a cure.

And what has the virus done for the kingdom of God/heaven??? Well, I know that it has caused some churches to go to a live stream worship service. Some have worship services through a technological wonder called "Zoom" where everyone who is on their computer can see each other, bringing them together *without* being in the same room with one another. Some may be worshiping by watching their favorite televangelist. Still, others may be reading *this* sermon on a website, but we are ALL part of the kingdom of God. And we are *all* trying different ways to share the word of God, even if we can't be together.

So let's try this again. The kingdom of heaven is like a tiny germ that caused a virus that got the upper hand, but caused *us* to seek out the kingdom in different ways, and due to technology, we have lots of *choices* to help us with the growth of the kingdom, and *maybe*, just *maybe*, the word of God in Christ is spreading even faster and bigger than it ever has before!

A lot of praise songs, and even hymns, speak of God as Lord and King. We sing of raising him up and exalting him in the highest heaven. The talk is high and mighty and royal. One would never think when *singing* those songs and hymns that what God in Christ had in mind was more down to earth like a farmer or a baker or something that gets fished out of the ocean.

God's kingdom is *messy*. Not *everything* in God's kingdom is perfect because, let's face it, he's working *with us*, and we are *far* from perfect. I mean...the kingdom of heaven could also be compared to kudzu. Kudzu is a plant that grows, at least to my knowledge, mostly in the south. Once Kudzu gets started, it grows everywhere, filling up the fences, power poles and power lines. It can stay green when everything else around it is dying. It's a messy plant...and it's hard to get rid of it. It grows into and onto everything...you know...exactly the way the word of God should spread. God's kingdom prevails, just like kudzu. (I bet you won't look at that plant the same way ever again!)

The awesome part of all of this is that *we* are those small, insignificant seeds that are able to come together to create something huge and lovely and wonderful and messy all at the same time! God put us here to love and to share and to offer grace and mercy to others, just as he offers grace and mercy to us.

And we never know when we might be planting seeds that will help grow the kingdom even more.

The story is told of a man who had stayed away from church for quite a long time after going through adolescence. He thought the church was too concerned with rules. It was too rigid for his liking, so he left, thinking he would never go back.

His father kept after him to go back to church; to give it another chance, and finally the man agreed to give it another try. He got up the nerve one Sunday to go, walking in, just in time to hear the congregation praying their version of the confession. "We have done those things which we ought not to have done and we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and there is no health in us." The man heard those words, and thought to himself, "Good! This sounds like my kind of crowd." He continued to worship there. A seed was planted.

We never know what kind of seed God has planted in US, just as we never know what kind of seed WE are planting in *others* for the growth of the kingdom. Once a seed is planted, if the seed is being watered with enough faith and belief, it can grow to great proportions!

Give some thought to the growth of the kingdom of heaven. Reach out to others during this time of uncertainty (but with hand sanitizer and a mask) and see what kind of seeds you can get to germinate. God in Christ uses *us*, the *least*, the *ordinary*, and the *messy*, to create the *unimaginable*! Amen!