

## Connecting to Jesus the Storyteller...“The Mustard Seed”

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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A pastor and a soap maker went for a walk. The soap maker said, “What good is religion? Look at the trouble and misery in this world after thousands of years of religion. If religion is true, why should this be?” The pastor said nothing. As they continued their walk they came upon a child playing in the mud. The pastor said, “What good is soap? You say soap makes people clean. We have had soap for generations and yet, with all the soap there is in this world, this child is still filthy. What good is soap?” The soap maker protested, “Soap can’t do any good unless it is used!” “Exactly,” replied the pastor, “same with Christianity. It isn’t effective unless it is used.”

I like stories. Jesus told stories. The stories Jesus told were well crafted, memorable, insightful, and incisive. Jesus told stories to get through to his listeners about the present reality of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God was one of Jesus’ most frequent topics...yet for many Christians, it is a confusing concept. In [Luke 4:43](#) Jesus explained his mission, saying, ***I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God...because that is why I was sent.*** [Mark 1:14,15](#) says, ***After John [the Baptist] was put into prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.”*** When Jesus’ disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, Jesus said, ***This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*** ([Matthew 6:9-10](#)) The Kingdom of God is like heaven on earth...and it begins with King Jesus.

The Jewish people had been expecting God to bring about His kingdom. They expected a messiah who would overthrow the Romans, destroy evil, and re-establish God’s reign - much like they had in the good, old days under King David. They expected messiah to be a warrior...and they could not imagine it any other way.

***Luke 13:18-19 Then Jesus asked, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.”***

Pollen. Mustard seeds are like pollen...tiny seeds that grow into huge plants. Mustard plants are not like our domestic plants. In the Middle East they grow wild and up to 12 feet high! They are a favorite nesting place for birds. It may be the crowds are looking at these plants as Jesus spoke. Maybe the seeds were filling the air. The image is clear...that which is tiny – even microscopic - CAN become enormous.

Jesus himself is like that mustard seed. The Eternal Son of God, creator of all things, became microscopic in the womb of Mary and was born a fully human Jew, halfway around the world, 2000 years ago. The growth in sheer numbers of those who call themselves Christian is staggering...close to a billion. And more good has been done in the name of Jesus than any other in the history of the world. Trees in Israel mean life. You look out over the desert and what do you hope to see? Green. An oasis where there will be water and shade and protection and life. Jesus comes into the desert of this world – and to our parched souls – he offers life itself.

The mustard seed grows naturally and it grows enormous. Jesus used the mustard seed to illustrate the power of faith in [Matthew 17:21](#): ***“If you have the faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”*** Why? Because of whom this mustard seed faith is in. Always remember: “Little is much when God is in it.” Jesus continues with a similar parable. . .

***Luke 13:20-21 Again Jesus asked, What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”***

What does yeast do to dough? It makes it expand and rise. A little yeast transforms the dough into leaven...like the blob you use to make sourdough bread. The listeners of Jesus, the Jewish people, were all about UN-leavened bread. Unleavened bread is what God told them to prepare the night of the Passover in Egypt. Unleavened bread is how they remember in their Seder – and why we use flat bread here at HPC. In [Matthew 16:11](#) Jesus said: ***“Be on your guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees”*** as he did not want their teaching to influence – and change - HIS disciples. A lesson we all need to heed to make certain we are disciples of Jesus – and not of Pastor Michael – or of Luis Palau – or of any one else.

In this one parable, Jesus changed the image of yeast (or leaven) completely – and positively. Jesus said a little bit of Kingdom of God yeast, when mixed with a large amount of flour, will make dough that rises with hope. Just because we don’t always see it, we shouldn’t doubt its spread. When lodged in the hearts of disciples, the Kingdom of God yeast spreads from one heart to the next and grows into the very Bread of Life. ***“I AM the Bread of Life”*** said Jesus in [John 6:35](#). The kingdom of God is hidden, but it is there – and it is growing – and it is transforming lives.

When the communists took over China in 1948, there were about 2 million Chinese Christians. In the years that followed, foreign missionaries were banished, church property was seized, all senior Chinese leaders were executed, lower-level leaders were imprisoned; all public Christian meetings were banned. It was one of the worst persecutions in world history. When the government began to allow westerners to visit in the late 1970s, they discovered that despite such horrible persecution, Christianity had flourished beyond all imagination - the number of Christians had grown from 2 to 60 million! And in 2000, to 85 million under “selective” persecution. I say “selective” because the government has found that Christians will address the problems of addiction and prostitution and homelessness...problems the state claims it does not have. The mustard seed of the Kingdom has tremendously grown to give refuge. The yeast of the Kingdom has transformed lives to give hope.

This is how the kingdom of God grows, naturally and silently, tremendously and transformationally. And we are a Kingdom people. The King of Kings is our king. The reign of Jesus has begun. It is right here and right now. Jesus said: ***“The kingdom of God has come to you”*** ([Luke 11:20](#)) and ***“The kingdom of God is within you.”*** ([Luke 17:21](#)) Do you believe it? Even just a little bit? Even just a mustard seed amount?

May God’s kingdom come and God’s will be done - in us - as it is in heaven. Amen.