

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church
Rev. Dr. Bart Roush & Rev. Mary Koon
Outdoor Worship at Moir Park
August 14, 2022
Matthew 13: 31-32

Mustard Seed
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Mary Koon

Jesus taught in parables, marvelous little stories in which he utilized everyday experiences of people, their lives and surroundings, to communicate spiritual truths. (Think about wheat and weeds, coins, fathers and sons, etc.) Storytelling is still one of the best ways to learn truths about life! When we hear Jesus say, “The Kingdom of God is like...” it’s an invitation to pay attention, to wonder and let his words find you. Jesus’ parables, while simple sounding, do not have just a singular meaning. They are hard to understand, and we ponder them still today. The stories were a means of communication with an oppressed people - subversive talk - helping them find hope in what must have felt like a hopeless situation. Those who could not listen deeply, merely discovered a simple story.

The parable we’re reading this morning is from Matthew 13, a chapter noted for multiple parables told one after another. It’s a little like looking at an old-fashioned photo album with photo after photo – different views of the same event. So we’ll stop at this one:

Matthew 13: 31-32

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³²it 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.” AMEN

The mustard seed would have been a symbol for the tiniest of things, perhaps the smallest thing imaginable to Jesus' listeners...barely visible to the human eye.

Someone takes this tiny seed, full of possibility and potential and plants it in the fertile earth. Deep in the dark soil, this invisible seed grows into something that nourishes and provides shelter and shade for animals and humans alike.

In the middle east, in Jesus' time, mustard seeds grew into small trees with multiple branches, with shoots that provided nutritious food for camels, sheep and goats, and sweet, fleshy fruit that could be cooked, eaten fresh or dried. This tree-bush provided a place for birds to nest.

From tiny beginnings - wild, surprising, enormous, beautiful, nurturing things can grow. (Like the kingdom of Heaven!)

With its reference to earth and creature, these few verses remind us that God's kin-dom, the liberation that Jesus ushers in, is not just good news for those who follow him, but for all creation – providing space for those we've ignored or pushed away – human and otherwise.

Again, there is no simple, single meaning to a parable. The stories are invitations to reflect on our faith, to place a mirror before our lives and dig deep. So this morning I'm going to share some of my wonderings about the tiny mustard seed that grows into a tree!

I wonder if Jesus is encouraging us to continue on with the small things we are doing, the seeds we are planting, to bring about social change and power shifts. Little things like naming our pronouns, or broadening where we get our news, or reading an article or book by an unfamiliar writer.

And I wonder if Jesus is saying that even the most tiny gestures, small acts of kindness and thoughtfulness, generosity and forgiveness, can

have an enormous impact. That what we do and say, how we conduct our individual lives matters.

I wonder if Jesus is pointing out that God's kin-dom is hidden in plain sight of all of us. That signs of the kingdom are all around us, hidden in plain sight!

What does it say about God that God's realm is here and also growing, clues of which are ours for the noticing in places surprisingly ordinary. That there may not be an amazing breakthrough or vision, but glimpses of God alive and at work in our daily lives.

And if this is so, what might it take to recognize signs of the kin-dom, to pay attention to the power and possibility, the goodness and love, justice-doing and mercy making that already exist in the world, and then to jump onto that movement of the spirit.

Surely, God's kin-dom is surprising, and will delight and challenge us, too! And maybe this kin-dom, once it takes root, is something that is strong and durable, not easily shaken or plucked up, like a stubborn weed.

So, as life-long learners and followers of Jesus, may we consider how we and others sow seeds of the kin-dom and then, how we nurture them and allow them the space and time to grow.

As we scatter seeds, we, too, must tend to the soil. Good soil requires attention, so let's be on the look-out for things that choke seeds out, like our cultural fear of scarcity, habitual cynicism, mindless consumption, and competition.

That's a lot of wondering for two short sentences of Jesus. My prayer is that we always come to God's word and God's world with curiosity, wonder and questions that crack open our minds and hearts a little wider to let God's love and light shine through. May it be so. AMEN