

Mark 4:26-34

Jesus spoke and taught his disciples in parables.

Parables were stories that had many layers and meanings to them. But they had one main purpose...they were meant to disrupt!

What's on the surface can easily be misunderstood. But at deeper levels the parables were meant to reveal the upside down – right side up-ness of God's kingdom hidden right in plain sight...

If you weren't feeling a little uncomfortable by the end of a parable then you probably didn't get what Jesus was getting at.

He also used common things to teach. He didn't talk scientifically or theologically ... He never told them that the world was round for example...he went up to the mountain to commune with God...just as they would have expected Jesus to do to commune with the gods...

Jesus taught this idea about the kingdom of God by using common analogies people could easily understand and Jesus ALWAYS met people where they were!

That's how you should always begin! And that is a very important thing to remember... when dealing with others in general. Meet people where they are... not where you are...or where you think they should be.

Today Jesus likens the kingdom of God to Gardening... Any gardeners here? We plant and we wait...not really knowing results we will get. Seems simple enough... It's one part your efforts and one part mystery...both together...co-creating with our creator!

Now let's look at the infamous mustard seed.

If one were to plant a seed in Israel one would first need to cultivate the soil by removing all the rocks from the field...and there are a lot of rocks there!

Then you would build a gan, it was a tiered terraced wall using the rocks you just extracted to capture the precious water in layers. Then you would carefully select your plants for each layer pending water requirements.

Now that's seems pretty normal...So where's the disruption?!

What are we missing?!

Well the mustard seed was the smallest seed known at the time but it was also known as something else...a quick germinating WEED! And like all weeds they would tend to grow anywhere...and there's no stopping weeds once they get going.

For Jesus' audience the presence of a Mustard tree in the middle of a field, especially full of birds, would be a major disruption to a gardener. The well-ordered field was for growing food and a mustard plant would just be sucking up precious water and resources needed for the desired crops.

In the parable of the mustard seed... Jesus is deliberately likening the kingdom of God to a weed. And he is speaking of birds being attracted to it...also Birds... the natural enemies of the sower...they eat the sown seed and also facilitate the spreading of mustard seeds far and wide in order to invade other people's well planted gardens.

The kingdom of God is like a WEED... like a dandelion! Now what do gardener's do with dandelions?

It was something that did not belong...something unexpected... growing right in the middle of the nicely ordered ways of man. That's a major disruption!

Jesus is saying the kingdom of God starts tiny, a small insignificant thing, yet like all weeds they will grow and can eventually take over the entire field. God's kingdom is a weed...subversive and seemingly

upside down and certainly not wanted by the kingdom of man that we build.

What will happen if this small weed finds fertile soil in your hearts...be careful what you wish for...The Spirit of God entering your hearts will work the slow process of transformation within you? A process you may not even welcome... because it will disrupt the way you are comfortably living right now!

You may even grow in ways you weren't quite expecting to grow! You see... What God grows is for the good of all... not just for your own individual benefit.

A seed growing... a union between the seed and the soil; and in the right circumstances... the power of God working in your heart has the power to transform not only you... but also the world around you.

And that which results will create a "new" and better way... which many may see as an undesirable weed growing into well-ordered lives and communities.

Just look at some independent news reports and it won't take long to see where the weeds are growing...it also won't take too long to see folks trying to eradicate them with weed killer...but those darn weeds just keep on coming back don't they.

The kingdom of God is slow and persistent! It's not a vending machine that you need to put something into in order to get something out. Nor is the kingdom of God like Amazon Prime... granting all our wishes and instant gratification... provided on demand by the maker of the universe! Yet many Christians see the kingdom of God as exactly that.

Think about your own growth...what you were like 7 or 15 years ago. Were you the same person then... does anyone say I was so much wiser when I was a teenager...you even had all the answers back then...Now

we know that the world is a lot more shades of gray and a lot less black and white!

Our lives are like that... we are not meant to experience this life or God for that matter - instantly. It unfolds...it's a slow process with much remaining hidden to us.

This simple parable talks about: Faith, Trust, Transformation, Potential, Patience and the power contained in the Word of God as it takes hold in you and then spreads and takes hold in the world. Welcome to the re-creation and transformation of the world... all you dandelions out there!

The mustard seed...a very small thing! And an undesirable weed...how innocuous was that small Jewish Rabbi – Jesus... snuffed out in just three years of ministry by the all-powerful Roman Empire...the kingdom of man back then.

How small were his little ragtag group of followers that were scattered throughout the world after his death...how insignificant such small things are...then I ponder other small things...how small is an atom before it collides with another atom setting off a chain reaction... how small is a cancer cell or a virus? What potential impact do these seemingly very small hidden things contain within them?

See many times what WE give our attention to is how big something is...But the kingdom of God works on a much smaller level... one where “potential” and long lasting changes are brought about...

That mustard seed that was the Word of God took hold in the Roman Empire as a weed that the Roman Empire tried to violently eradicate on several occasions... but after a time that same weed actually took over the entire Roman Empire and birthed with it the widespread seeds of Christianity which then spread throughout the rest of the world!

How successful are we at eliminating the dandelions in our lawns... take off a year of lawn care and magically they all just reappear once more!

...and by the way... a dandelion is much more beneficial a plant than grass isn't it? It's medicinal and nutritional... and for us Episcopalians you can even make tea or wine from it...

Yet we use so much of our resources trying to eradicate it...A dandelion gives back... whereas grass just keeps taking...the kingdom of God is subversive and upside down...or really rather right side up!

Parables would also disguise the truth. See it's easier to plant a seed or an idea in someone and have it grow slowly over time vs. attempting to change someone or something immediately where it will usually be met with resistance.

Jesus is calling us into a very different way of being with ourselves, with one another, and with God... recognizing that spiritual growth and intimacy with God arises as naturally... and as mysteriously as a seed growing!

The seed grows from within and starts very small...but still the seed must die to itself to realize its full and lasting potential... The potential of an acorn is to be a Mighty Oak tree...not just a bigger acorn!

We put the seeds out there and God makes them into something new. The gardener can put the seed in the ground but can't really do anything about its growth.

Just like the growth of our children. Growth is often a passive and patient event with so much hidden to us...even though it's in our nature to try and control everything.

In a kingdom of man mentality, we may resemble more of a Human Doing rather than a Human Being! In our drive to control everything around us we might actually miss the plot along the way.

We often confuse the ways of God (focused on all of creation together) with our way of doing things (focused on me and my own tribe first)

It's a paradox...you see we are all in partnership and are co-creators with God. That's why focusing on God and others first keeps us from getting into trouble.

When we are in harmony with God...Shalom... only then can our true nature and potential be fully realized...making us into something new - a new creation in Christ...so like the mustard tree once grown ...all of God's creatures may then find solace in us.

The parable emphasizes that the kingdom of God is dependent upon God's grace AND our human initiative. Seeds sown by us become the transforming power of God in the world. While we are called to sow and scatter the seed... the growth and transformation that takes place is up to God! We then as Christians are both seeds AND planters in this kingdom.

Our seeds are our gifts, talents and passions...all graced to us...they are to be used to spread God's love to all the corners of the Earth...and those weeds will take hold and spread. Revealing and bringing about the God's kingdom all over the place.

God invites you and I to grow into a larger reality...not just a bigger version of ourselves... but something resurrected, something transformed...something made new!

A garden? That's how the creation story begins... in a garden. ...and later upon Jesus' resurrection - in a Garden... Mary supposes Jesus for the gardener. Sowing and reaping the kingdom of God.

Something dies to itself only to be transformed into something new. And Jesus points to the fact that it is both a mystery and that it is also very natural for it to happen...in fact we can't keep new life from bursting forth even when everything around us may appear to be dying.

The kingdom of God will grow and spread whether we choose to participate as gardeners in it or not.

So my friends go in peace... to love and sow the weeds of the kingdom of God wherever you may go!

Your faithful servant,

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