

WELCOME 19 August 2018 – 13 Pentecost '18 B

Matthew 13:31-32

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here this morning. Please stay with us for morning tea after worship so we can get a chance to know one another better...

"From little things big things grow. From little things big things grow."

We hope that's true about our super. We want it to be true about that business venture we've backed or the sowing we did last April or the livestock we have out there eating the feed we just laid out. It'd be great if it were the case with that song we uploaded to YouTube. How awesome if that's how our promotion went from the warehouse to the admin suite.

Human aspiration normally points up & to the right...growing profit, advancing prestige, increasing power...from little things...

Jesus says his kingdom is like one of those little things...a mustard seed...the smallest of all seeds...but it grows into a large "tree" to provide refuge, safety, nurture, & rest. His kingdom is a home where all are welcome & all find shelter from generation to generation into eternity.

Profitable...maybe not. Prestigious...doubtful. Power...only the power of love, the strength of hope, the authority of service & the sovereignty of life without end...

We'll explore and experience that together today...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Father God into us you sow your love and the promise of life with you forever. Grow that promise and multiply that hope until your joy is fulfilled and all are gathered to you. In Jesus' Name...Amen.

13 PENTECOST '18 B – CONTRAST – PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

- FAITH CHAT:**
1. What did/do you want to be when you grew/grow up?
 2. How is the Christian community a place of refuge & nurture for you?
 3. In the last week, where did you catch a glimpse of God's presence in the world?

For want of a nail the shoe was lost;
For want of a shoe the horse was lost;
For want of a horse the battle was lost;
For the failure of battle the kingdom was lost—

All for want of a horse-shoe nail. — Unattributed - from *50 Famous People* by James Baldwin

No one's really sure where that particular quote originated...variations stretch back hundreds of years across dozens of cultures...but we understand the thought. Little things can make a big difference. When we lived in Nth Tx I had some repairs done to our car & one of the mechanics left the nut off a bolt in the tie rod assembly & one wheel came loose & the wheel turned completely sideways...Fortunately God had me all alone on the road & not moving quickly or it could have been a real mess.

History is littered with examples of how one small thing changed the course of history...NASA - 1983 Challenger – 'O'-rings - 1999 Mars Rover because 1 project team was using metric system in its calculations while another was using the imperial system. Some historical reports suggest the Titanic's lookout didn't have the key to one of the supply lockers on the ship & therefore wasn't able to access/use the binoculars in that locker to scan the sea for obstacles like icebergs. Watergate burglary 2 pieces of duct tape. Little things can make a big difference.

Here is another illustration Jesus used: *"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, & birds come & make nests in its branches."* In his best-selling ground-breaking book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey lists as the 2nd habit: Begin with the end in mind. In other words, "What's the point of what you're doing/saying? Start there." Keep the big picture in focus.

This is the 3rd parable in a series of 7 Jesus tells in Mt 13; & if we lose sight of where he began...we'll miss this one entirely. If we lose sight of the big picture we lose the whole thing...I know...I have for a long time.

1st parable – Sower...farmer sows seeds like a drunken sailor...footpath, rocks, furrows...Point? God pours out his love extravagantly lavishly relentlessly so that every corner of his creation can experience his unceasing grace & generous mercy & become his harvest...his prized possession...so that all can become his children drawn to him by that gift of extravagant unrestrained life & love.

2nd parable – Weeds...God in Jesus suffers evil to forgive it & those who do it...us. God will in God's way in God's time bring us to the fullness of his kingdom where all things evil hurtful broken are no more...We can live now in the face of evil as his people knowing the final triumph is already ours in Jesus risen from the dead.

So far...we live in relationship to a God of extravagant lavish love who is also the God of ultimate victory by love...3rd parable – Mustard Seed - By all accounts, Jesus was a gross disappointment to the religious hierarchy of his day. That's why they killed him...but really...Every Rabbi, every scholar of the Hebrew scriptures, every faithful Jew in Jesus' day was waiting for Kingdom of God/Heaven – Reign/Rule of God to break into their world. They'd been waiting for about 500 years. When you wait that long you have a pretty fair idea of what you are waiting for...

They all had a pretty good idea of what this kingdom was supposed to be like. It was the vast expanse of David's rule writ large. They were waiting for a warrior king. Best image we have is of one of the Crusader kings...big battle steed, lance, sword, shield, armour...This kingdom/king would set things right, call the enemies of God's people to account, stamp out evil, wreak vengeance & judgement against all who refused to fall down in obedience to the God of Heaven's armies. The Romans would be driven into the sea. The Temple would be rebuilt in massive scale & all nations would flood Israel with their gifts & their worship.

But Jesus said, *"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, & birds come & make nests in its branches."* The Kingdom is a "tree"? Not just any tree...a mustard seed/tree. That which was just one step up from a pest species. Nobody ever planted mustard seeds on purpose... or if you did, you planted them as far away from your house as you can because they are self-seeding...invasive...spread places you don't expect. Every 1st century gardener knows the mustard bush is a problem...mop-top sucklings that crop up in your yard from your neighbour's tree. Burn it with fire & salt the ground it's planted in.

Was not the kingdom supposed to be a mighty display of God's defeat of evil & the removal of the nations afflicting Israel? Was not the kingdom supposed to be a settling of scores, a balancing of scales, retribution for wrongs done & grievances suffered? "Jesus...your miracles are nice, your stories quaint, the way you treat kids just darling, but

where is the rest of the story? Where is the conqueror king?" Such questions would have plagued Jesus' hearers: both friend & foe.

Begin with the end in mind says Covey, and Jesus says, "Father God is lavish in love. Extravagant in mercy. Indiscriminate with forgiveness. Abundant in grace. In that lavish extravagant indiscriminate abundance all can find refuge, security, nurture, safety...all can be at home with the Father."

Parable literally means to "*place beside.*" Character of the kingdom according to Jesus is not the warrior king who wields the biggest sword & mightiest army...It is instead a solace – a refuge fortress & haven – a home...It would forever be so because Jesus would die & rise to make it so. *Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. – 1 Pt 3:18*

We know...Jesus became human in the least likely of places from the least likely of families. His friends were the least likely of polite company. His picture of the Kingdom & Rule of God was the least likely to fit in with what folks expected & longed for. But in that is our salvation...life – hope – joy unmatched unparalleled & unending...*The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God. As the Scriptures say, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise & discard the intelligence of the intelligent."...God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. He chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, & used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God. God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure & holy, & he freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord." 1 Cor 1:18ff*

For each of us swept up in the branches of that kingdom tree, life is never the same. Fishermen travel far from home & end up dying for a condemned criminal they confess is the Messiah. Later Christians will suffer all manner of persecution because they trust the God who honors the undesirables of the world by calling them blessed. And years beyond that all kinds of otherwise ordinary people will dare unbelievably brave acts of compassion in the name of this kingdom & its unlikely king.

There is encouragement in this parable. The kingdom of heaven – a qualitatively different & more vibrant joy-filled way of existence promises that you & I are planted in a relationship with God & his grace is reigning in us...God reaches out to us to make us his & sows his life/way in us such that we become something greater more life-giving than we ever imagined. God takes little things...insignificant things... seemingly worthless things...to accomplish great things.

He takes your stammering lips, your faltering prayers, your acts of grace & generosity & your fragile service & by it the kingdom grows. Improbable? Yes! But mightily. That's his promise. Profitable...maybe not. Prestigious...doubtful. Power...only the power of love, the strength of hope, the authority of service & the sovereignty of life without end...

Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, & patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, & forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. Always be thankful. Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach & counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms & hymns & spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. Whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. – Col 3:12ff

Begin with the end in mind: and Jesus says, "Father God is lavish in love. Extravagant in mercy. Indiscriminate with forgiveness. Abundant in grace. In that lavish extravagant indiscriminate abundance all can find refuge, security, nurture, safety...all can be at home with the Father."

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Let's pray with that in mind: **Father God we are yours and yours alone. Let the seed of your grace grow in us until we are refuge for the weary, solace for the downhearted, joy for the sorrowing and hope of life with you for the lost. Give us the presence and power of your Spirit to reveal in everything we do, the life and victory of your Son Jesus. We pray in his name...Amen.**