



The Kingdom of God is a Seedy Place – Touchpoint for June 9, 2021

Mark 4:26-32 (NRSV) ²⁶ He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸ The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

³⁰ He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God?”

Well, this oughta be good!!! The glory!!! The grandeur!!! The magnificence!!!

C'mon Jesus...give it to us. The gold paved streets. The walls with foundations made of jasper and sapphire. And gates made from pearls. C'mon Jesus, give us a preview of the vision that John gave us in Revelation!!!

“The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. Which grows into a great, big.....

SHRUB!”

Really, a SHRUB?! Couldn't we at least have the cedars of Lebanon...or the Saguaros of Carefree.

“The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. Which grows into a great, big, SHRUB!”

Why don't you just say the kingdom of God will grow into a tumbleweed?

Apparently, Jesus hadn't read the book of Revelation. I really do like John's description much better in that book.

“The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. Which grows into a great, big, SHRUB!”

Now, I'm no botany major, though I do have a friend that is. But I don't think she'd be much help on middle east horticulture. Anyway, the commentaries I read on this say that the mustard plant pretty much grows wild over in Palestine. It's not something you plant, so it really isn't a cash crop. Hmm...I think there's a whole sermon for the institutional church in that statement alone.

Anyway, it grows wild, kind of like a weed, and it's hard to get rid of. It pops up anywhere and everywhere. It kind of messes with those well-groomed front yards we like to present to the world to show we have our act together.

Perhaps we should be a little more careful when we pray, “**Thy kingdom come...**”

But it is useful. A mustard plant has medicinal purposes. And it is a place of refuge. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that grows into a great shrub and birds nest in it.

That's it. The kingdom of God is good in what it is. It just is.

Now I suppose a bird could fly around that shrub and debate if few or many will nest there. I suppose it could debate all the reasons it deserves to nest there.

Its ancestors nested there.

It flies by once a week for an hour.

It has a personal relationship with the #1 bird in the tree.

It has accepted that shrub as its personal home and nesting place.

But you see the absurdity in all of that? Those things count for nothing. The bird can nest in that shrub for only one reason--Someone has provided the shrub for it. Birds are made to nest. And someone provided that shrub to make it possible.

Matt Skinner, a professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary writes this as a commentary on this passage:

The parable...depends on satire... The reign of God will mess with established boundaries and conventional values. Like a fast-replicating plant, it will get into everything. It will bring life and color to desolate areas. It will crowd out other concerns. It will resist our manipulations. Its humble appearance will expose and mock pride and pretentiousness like a good burlesque show. As a result, some people will want to burn it all down in a pointless attempt to restore their fields...

The parables insist that the new order Jesus declares through his words and deeds will not be relegated to certain spheres. There is no special biome to which the mustard plant is confined. With its seeds carried by the wind and stuck to hiker's shoelaces, it will grow where it will.

He continues:

... the reign of God does not carve out a separate sacred space; it claims all aspects of human existence. There is no such thing, not in Christianity at least, of an apolitical gospel. There is no economically neutral gospel. There is no gospel that dismisses the importance of embodied existence and personal relationships. Whatever you preach and however your church conducts its ministry, if it doesn't provide sanctuary, hospitality, sustenance, and renewal to those who need it, like little birds in a field of foxes, then it isn't the gospel.

You know, that last line could be the basis for a great mission statement for a retreat center. And then he finishes with this great line, **In short, there is no gospel in which Jesus remains buried in the ground as a dormant seed.**

You know, I couldn't have said it better if I had tried to plagiarize it myself. And I did, I really did try.

If it all sounds so seedy, that's because it is. Apparently, the kingdom of God is a seedy place, filled with seedy characters. And if you don't believe me, just READ the bible.

It grows within us and around us. It happens to us and inside us. Without our effort and oftentimes in spite of us. And some of us may even be allergic to it at times when it blossoms around us.

Because apparently, we are neither creators of the kingdom, nor co-creators of it. We are simply recipients of it. Now that doesn't mean we can't share it. We can. But just because I share a meal with you doesn't mean I cooked it. Just because I share my tickets to a baseball game with you doesn't mean I built the stadium and made it to the major leagues.

And if you don't have it all figured out, that's OK. Let these parables be a source of comfort. There is mystery to it all. The seed grows and the sower does not know how.

The mustard seed – so small and insignificant – becomes a great shrub with healing and nesting qualities. There is a mystery to it all. And THE Mystery it seems, just won't stop planting the seed of the kingdom inside us and around us. And by around us, I mean in other – ALL OTHERS – even “THOSE PEOPLE”.

The seeding is ongoing. Driven by the wind, the Spirit... and carried by those who may not even be aware they are carrying it. And our task, is not to figure it out, but to live in it, nest in it, and grow in it. The Mystery it seems, just won't stop planting the seed of the kingdom inside us and around us.

Isn't that what happens in this meal?

In the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus, surrounded by a betrayer, a denier, and a bunch of cowards... a rather seedy group don't you think?

Jesus takes bread and wine and plants himself, and the seed of the kingdom in them. It all looks rather ordinary, some simple bread and wine... It's a rather small act... hardly noticeable. A simple meal with common ordinary elements...And yet something is set in motion... something new is about to grow.

The seed of grace is planted. The Mystery of grace takes root in us.

And we find a home, a resting place, a nesting place, from which we can spread our wings and fly, and live and move and have our being...

and return again to the grace and mercy of the Divine Mystery...which is growing everywhere and in everyone.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Hearken to My Voice

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Hearken to my voice, O Lord when I call. Have mercy on me and answer me.
You speak in my heart, and say, "Seek my face". Your face, Lord will I seek.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

You are the Center, Lord

(Margaret Rizza, Kevin Mayhew Ltd.)

You are the center, you are my life. You are the center, O Lord of my life.
Come, Lord and guide me, Lord of my life. Send me your spirit, Lord of my life.
You are the center, you are my life. You are the center, O Lord of my life.
Come, Lord and heal me, Lord of my life.
Come, Lord, and teach me, Lord of my life.
You are the center, O Lord of my life.
Give me your spirit and teach me your ways.
Give me your peace, Lord, and set me free.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer.

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

Benediction

The Lord Bless You and Keep You

(National Lutheran Choir, Peter C. Lukin)

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you.
To shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift up
the light of his countenance upon you. And give you peace....