

## **The Kingdom of Small Things**

### **Matthew 13: 31-33**

Good Morning Church Family,

It feels good to be together this morning, I hope that our worship gatherings are encouraging and refreshing for each of you. And a warm welcome to those of you who are joining us on the livestream this morning.

We're continuing through our series of the Kingdom of Heaven parables found in Matthew 13. We've talked about the Parable of the Sower: how God invites us to spread the good news of Jesus in all places our lives touch, trusting that he'll reap the harvest. We've talked about the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds: a reminder that God is the only one truly knows people's hearts, our calling is to show love and grace to everyone, and leave the judgment to God. This morning, our parable is a two for one deal, two very short parables that Jesus tells to illustrate an important truth about what the Kingdom of God is like.

“ He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it 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. He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

I love baking bread, cinnamon rolls, and buns. There is just something about taking a yeasty slice of bread, still warm from the oven, and then slathering it with salted butter. Just such a perfect, simple joy. Usually, these days, when I make a yeasted item it more or less comes out how I hope it will, but any professional baker will tell you that learning to make bread is a learning curve. Unlike cookies or cakes, bread is alive- with a mind of its own, impacted by temperature, humidity, the weight of the flour. The culprit of this aliveness is, of course, the yeast. When I was a kid, I remember my mom pulling the packets of yeast out of the cupboard, searching for their expiry date, knowing that there was no point in using expired yeast. It was pointless. I remember attempting to make a batch of cinnamon rolls, early in our marriage, and mistakenly assuming that I could swap out my “active dry yeast” for the “instant yeast” this particular recipe called for. As I kneaded the wad of dough, I quickly realized something was wrong. Rather than that glorious yeasty scent, the dough was littered with the little peels of undissolved yeast. No hope of activating a rise. I hucked it down in the trash and laid down dramatically on the couch, defeated. Taylor returned home to our apartment about an hour later. “Emily, why is there a giant ball of dough in the trash?” “I don’t want to talk about it!” A pastor friend told me about how a congregant had put a plate of cinnamon rolls on her doorstep one Easter morning. “Enjoy the rolls!”, the note read, “Unlike our Lord, they didn’t rise. Sorry!”

Yeast! It's such an itty bitty thing, but that tiny thing makes all the difference to the outcome of bread. The same is true of mustard seeds, such a teeny tiny seed, 2 millimeters in diameter, but when it springs to life, it can grow into a tree that provides oxygen, shade, and a home for wildlife. It should be noted that I spent time googling to see if mustard trees can grow in Canada, they apparently cannot, but the images I found online show a tree with a sort of twisted, sprawling canopy. One that Junia would declare "a good climbing tree". Why does Jesus liken these two things to the kingdom?

The connection we see between the mustard seed and the yeast is that both start small, but in time, grow into something more than their humble beginnings. And, while tiny, they change their environment, change their surroundings. They bring life and richness, and so to is the story of the kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom, this grand, graceful beautiful thing that Jesus declared is built from tiny things. From ordinary actions. From everyday people. From small kindnesses, small faith, small mercies offered into the world in the name of Jesus Christ. The Kingdom is grown through small things. And, that sisters and brothers, is very good news. Let's talk about why.

Because the Kingdom is built on small things that means that everyone can participate. Everyone's actions are significant in Kingdom building. There is no such thing as unqualified, too small to matter, not important enough. Jesus says this good news is for everyone, and everyone from ages 1-100+ can love God and love their neighbor. Really, how many social enterprises can you think of these days where everyone is welcome

and encouraged to participate? Where there is no minimum or maximum age? The book of 1st Timothy is a letter from Paul to a young pastor, named Timothy. It seems that Timothy must be experiencing some insecurities about being a young faith leader, so Paul encourages him, "Teach these things and insist that everyone learn them. Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity. Until I get there, focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers, and teaching them." That's first Timothy 4:11. I would say that the inverse of Paul's encouragement is also true, don't feel looked down upon because you're older (Or when the Pastor's Daughter tells you that you're all old!), everyone is encouraged to contribute to the family or faith and the mission of the church. A few weeks ago, I interviewed Harry Harder from Pleasant Point Mennonite Church near Clavet. Harry volunteers with the Person to Person prison visitation ministry. Harry first got involved with that ministry as he was entering his "retirement" years. Harry said this, "I know lots of people when they get to retirement like to travel, and go golfing, which is fine, but there's still so many ways to be involved in meaningful things. "I think a lot of people want to do something meaningful, and if you come into this program you see a part of the world you've never seen -racism, poverty, injustice, stare you right in the face, Not that you fix it, but you will be exposed and be involved. It's a very meaningful place to spend this retirement season of life. My feeling is that this is a place of consequence, important stuff, relating to people who don't have access to all the stuff you do. This is real life for some people and we need to know that." The Kingdom of Heaven is a place of consequence, where everyone matters.

Because everyone can participate, because the kingdom is built on small things, that means that small things matter. While that may seem like an obvious statement, I don't want us to overlook this. Nothing is too small to matter. Every word, every action, every moment of kindness, grace or love is a mustard seed for the kingdom. A sprinkle of yeast in the life of another.

When I am grieving someone or something, the first place that I feel it in my body is always my stomach. My stomach always hurts and no food sounds good. I saw a joke on the internet the other day that said, "Trust my gut!?! The thing that can't even handle milk!" That's my stomach, when my beloved Grandfather passed away in August 2013, I was wrecked. I was 26, and it was truthfully, my first real loss of someone I loved deeply. I know that's a privilege to be able to say that. But immediately after hearing the news, my stomach pain began and it settled there as we made preparation for his service. My best friend, Andrea, who at the time was also a co-worker, brought me a giant jar of crabapple sauce, and it was the only thing that I could manage to stomach in my grief. Tart, bright pink, and exactly zero work to prepare, I lived off of it for the better part of a week. And she kept bringing to my doorstep, jar after jar, as soon as one was emptied, she'd drop off two more. Taylor, tending me in my sadness, would keep serving bowls of crab applesauce, reminding me that I should eat. And it was that small kindness of applesauce that carried me through my grief. The thoughtfulness of a friend who couldn't stop the pain of loss, but could give of what she had.

Amanda Held Opelt, wrote this beautiful book that I've been reading this week. (Thank you Common Word!) She writes about her own grief journey through the loss of her only sister, Rachel. She traces that journey while writing about various grief rituals in the western world -like keening, covering mirrors, wearing black- one chapter that is particularly beautiful is about the Jewish practice of "Sitting Shivah" -its the seven day mourning period a family undertakes when a loved one dies. Amanda writes, "Shivah is a time of sheltered grief, where the family can focus on tending to their pain and processing their sorrow. Friends take care of the household tasks, prepare food and provide for the families needs. Visitors will bring simple dishes and gather around the family, sitting on the floor with them. It's the physical presence that matters most. It's as if to say "My words are hollow. My offering is not enough for this loss. Buy my body, sitting here next to yours, is good. It is enough...Silence is the default setting, and friends take cues from the mourning family on how to engage. If the family is sharing stories, visitors will also share stories. If the family is weeping, visitors will also weep. If the family is laughing, the visitors will laugh along with them." God can use even the simple gift of presence to bring his Grace to people, even silence builds the kingdom.

I know that often I feel inadequate at "ministering to people". Dropping off a lasagna with a grieving family. Praying for the mending of a broken relationship. Reading Bible stories to the kids at Kids Club. I wonder does this matter? Is this really enough? And Jesus Yes, it is enough! It matters! Don't I have to have some grand strategic plan, some big vision of how the kingdom will be built in our community? No, I don't think we do. All of those little things matter because God takes mustard seeds, takes yeast,

prayers, and food on doorsteps and God builds his Kingdom out of those things. God takes whatever we have to offer, whatever small loaves and fishes we bring and turns that into the abundance of his Love.

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it 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. He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

The kingdom of heaven is like a friend, who kept delivering crab applesauce, because it's all your stomach could handle. The kingdom of heaven is like the game of cards you play everyday with your aging mother. The kingdom of heaven is like garden abundance, shared with neighbors, friends, and strangers. The kingdom is heaven is like a weekly phone call to your brothers in Alberta. The kingdom of heaven is like offering to be the emergency contact for a friend's child at school. The kingdom of heaven is lasagna on doorsteps, jam jar flower bouquets on kitchen tables. The kingdom of heaven is potluck, and coffee fellowship. The kingdom of heaven is built through small acts of ordinary everyday love that everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, is welcomed to do.

Amen.