

**The Rev. Mary Haggerty**  
**St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church – Florissant, MO**  
**Proper 12, July 26, 2020**  
**Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33,44-52**

I wonder what it was like for the disciples to hear Jesus talk about the Kingdom of Heaven. After regaling them with metaphors ... the Kingdom of Heaven is like ... so many different things ... He asks them if they understood what he said. I am a little suspicious of their quick and easy, “yes!” Jesus has just thrown a lot at them to think about and digest. I’m not sure they’re meant to jump to a quick, “yes!”

We might tend to jump quickly, too. We know these stories– the tiny mustard seed grows into a huge bush. Or the yeast - it only takes a tiny bit of leavening to make a whole lot of bread. We have domesticated these stories. But they would have been surprising at the very least, maybe even disturbing, to the disciples who heard them for the first time.

Take the mustard seed. It IS tiny, maybe not the smallest seed, but it was tiny enough that it might be hidden in a sack of seed. The farmer wouldn’t suspect that it was there when he plants his neat, orderly rows of seeds. A farmer has a plan - she knows what she plants and what it will ultimately produce. Ah but the mustard seed, hiding among the dominant seeds, produces something different, something new that no one expected. Imagine the disciples, looking for direction, wanting to know that this Way, this path they have chosen to follow is leading them to something that makes sense, something they can count on. But Jesus says, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, hidden and unpredictable. God’s rule is not about carefully tended rows of belief or practice. It’s invasive in ways we might never expect, it may show up in places we never imagined. Were the disciples really ready to say yes to that so quickly?

I wonder, too, if they might have been disappointed listening to Jesus talk about the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus uses such ordinary images – seeds and plants, yeast and bread, fishing nets, baking, plowing. There are no great rulers in his images, no military leaders, or even kings or queens. Just ordinary everyday people doing ordinary everyday things. Were the disciples hoping for more might and majesty? Were they ready to say a resounding yes to the everyday meeting of the sacred with the mundane?

And then there's the subversive nature of this Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus describes. The mustard seed doesn't grow into a tall, noble tree. It's a junk shrub. In the ancient world the leaven Jesus talks about was a symbol for moral corruption. The yeast that the baker woman hides in the flour wasn't a packet full of granules like what we know today. It would have been a rotting, fermenting bit of leftover dough. The person who finds the treasure hides it and doesn't tell the owner about it before he buys the field – that's shady behavior. And the merchant who ultimately puts himself out of business by selling everything he has to buy the pearl of great price? A merchant's motives would have been highly suspect. Jesus uses shocking images for the Kingdom of God. I wonder what the disciples were saying yes to. Did they really understand that the Kingdom of God is fundamentally different than the Empire of their day? Did they really understand that pursuing this Kingdom of Heaven all around them might lead them to uncomfortable places?

Do we? I don't know about you, but I need some time and some prayer and some quiet to ponder all that comes up in today's reading before I can really say "yes" to it. I need to ask myself how predictable do I want God to be in my life? Am I willing to allow God to invade MY orderly sense of things and move me in directions I never imagined? Are we willing, as a church,

to move out of our comfort zone and let the Spirit of God surprise us and produce in us new, even seemingly unorthodox ways of announcing the reign of God?

This reign of God that Jesus preaches is rooted in the ordinary day to day life all around us and that is good news. God is accessible to us. If we are going to say “yes” to it, we have to also understand the challenge in that. If the Kingdom of God is like the day to day, then we have to be willing to see God hidden in plain sight all around us. Could the Kingdom of Heaven be like a simple cotton mask? Or maybe the Kingdom of Heaven is like a group of young people peacefully protesting policies that say some people matter more than others. The Kingdom of Heaven could be a police officer willingly stepping into danger to protect a vulnerable citizen. The Kingdom of Heaven could be behind the checkout counter at the grocery store or the teenager cutting through our parking lot on the way to somewhere else. The Kingdom of Heaven may even be right within our walls as we shelter in place. I heard notes of that on our Zoom call last Sunday – you talked about baking and getting to spend more time with family. I heard some of you cherish the slowing down that this time has mandated, the time to rest and read and garden.

Nothing is beyond the realm of God. Jesus tells us in today’s parables that God cannot be contained. God is not confined to what we deem acceptable. God uses the most unlikely, the most surprising, the most ordinary things of our lives to reveal to us God’s vision for creation.

And that is indeed Good News this morning! When we say “yes” to the Kingdom of Heaven we will be challenged, we will have to be open to change and growth, we will have to let go of the orderly, predictable things we cling to that might cloud our vision. And Jesus tells us, when we do that, we open ourselves to the boundless joy of the kingdom, to the fullness of life that God promises, and ultimately to the peace which surpasses all understanding.

St. Paul assures us this morning that, as citizens of this unpredictable, ordinary, subversive Kingdom, the Spirit will help us have eyes to see it clearly. All things will work together for good when we embrace the Kingdom of God. And nothing, not death or life, not angels, rulers, things present, things to come, powers and principalities, NOTHING in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. To that, let us respond with a resounding “YES!”