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## **It's the Little Things**

*Matthew 13:31-33*

*<sup>31</sup>He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; <sup>32</sup>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." <sup>33</sup>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."*

Last week we learned of imposter weeds that looked like wheat. Pastor Travis shared with us his masterful gardening skills and gave us all his pastoral blessing to let the weeds grow with the wheat. Well, this week, it seems we are still on weeds, just a different species of plant. Our first parable today discusses a farmer planting a mustard seed in his field.

This would qualify, as Pastor Travis discussed last week, as a poor farming choice. We look at mustard seeds as being the cute little round things that we rarely, if ever, use from our seasoning turn tables. And while we know what mustard is, the yellow stuff from the plastic squirt bottles, we don't understand what a mustard seed or a mustard shrub meant when this parable was first told.

Mustard, it turns out, is a weed. The mustard seeds were so small among other seeds that it was unnoticable to a farmer sowing seeds if any mustard seeds had fallen into the mix. But like most pesky weeds, mustard shrubs pop up quickly, taking water and lots of space from other plants. Like most weeds, a mustard bush will pop up before the rest of your harvest. A mustard bush can be anywhere from 6 to 20 feet tall and have a 20 foot branch span. It's not a tiny bush, and certainly not something a farmer would intentionally plant in a field. Farmers needed every bit of space in their fields to grow the necessary crops. They wouldn't have planted something they deemed useless just for the birds of the air to have a place to nest.

Mustard bushes were like kudzu is today. I grew up in a house that had a large empty lot behind our property line. The city decided decades ago the best thing to fill that land was kudzu. If you know anything about kudzu you know it grows at a very rapid rate. It's very hard to control and it's even hard to cut it back. I remember spending hours with weed eaters and pruning shears trying to tackle it so it wouldn't go over our fence into our backyard. At times it almost seemed hopeless. No one would intentionally plant kudzu in their field today. Just like no one would have intentionally planted mustard seeds in their fields years ago.

Imagine the response Jesus got when he said the kingdom of heaven is like kudzu. It's like this weed that you all have experience with and all dislike. The kingdom of heaven is

like a little mustard seed. But he doesn't stop there. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that grows into something larger than we could imagine. Not simply a weed of 20 feet, but a weed that gives life. A weed that provides security, shade, nurture, and a home to birds living in a hot region. A weed that grows into a tree where these birds of the air can continue giving life to more birds of the air.

It's not the story people were expecting and certainly not the ending to motivate farmers to plant mustard seeds, but there was a twist. This unintentional plant gives life, it's nurturing and caring. It's unpredictable. And this unpredictable life giving weed, it's like the kingdom of heaven, that provides security, nurture and a home to all those in need. What a bizarre story to compare to the kingdom.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. No. No, Jesus likes making people think. He likes sharing these simple, memorable stories. So he goes on to tell them that the kingdom of heaven is like a woman!, who takes yeast!, and mixes it with 3 measures of flour! The surprises within this one sentence parable is crazy.

First off, comparing the kingdom of heaven to a woman? A common woman? Doing household work? The kingdom of heaven is like housework? To compare the kingdom of heaven to a woman isn't shocking to us, but again, when this was first told, it was pretty racy. When we break it down, that Jesus is comparing the kingdom to housework, even today it doesn't seem quite right.

We sing of mansions, robes, and crowns. We sing of Jesus lifted on high. We imagine those streets of gold and we're told the kingdom is like housework? It doesn't make sense. Not yet at least. So we'll continue with the parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a woman who takes yeast. Wow. I know we don't think anything of yeast. Most of us probably have it in our kitchens, or at least have products made with yeast or some kind of leavening agent. Our breads, crackers, and even some of our juices and drinks contain yeast. We don't think anything about it.

But at this time, yeast was a symbol of impurity, an item disposed of in preparation for Passover. Yeast meant a variety of things to listening ears; sin, pride, false teaching, corruption, impurity, hypocrisy, disobedience. After all, leavening is an element, influence, or agent that works subtly to lighten, enliven, or modify the whole.

And that is the whole idea behind the parable. The idea behind leaven is that it's in the entire batch you're baking. It can't be in one part and not the other, it wouldn't bake right and you can't separate it once it's in there. When you add leavening, you add it to the whole batch.

So now we have Jesus saying the kingdom of heaven is like an impurity mixed throughout the whole world. Is that the kingdom's virtue? Even with our impurity parable from last week of the weeds and wheat, we still can't make sense of why Jesus would be comparing the kingdom to spreading sin and corruption throughout the world.

So let's go on and finish the parable, maybe it will make sense in the end. The kingdom of heaven is like a woman who takes yeast and mixes it in with 3 measures of flour until it was all leavened. Well, that part doesn't sound odd. Three measures, that's what like 3 cups of flour? No? It's not, well, let's see, 3 measures of flour, WOW, is definitely more than 3 cups. In fact, 3 measures of flour is 144 cups of flour, to be precise. To show how insane a number that is, it would have taken a 100-quart mixer with a dough hook the size of your leg to knead it all. That's a lot of flour. In fact, it would have made 52 one pound loaves of bread. Enough for a feast! Enough for a wedding feast! Enough to feed the multitudes!

What crazy parables. Abundance from the smallest weeds seed turns into a tree of life. And corrupt leaven can feed a multitude of people. That's the kingdom of life, that's the kingdom according to Jesus. This doesn't fit neatly into our little kingdom boxes. None of these things are in the songs we sing. Even if we can't envision what the kingdom of heaven is like, we couldn't imagine it being like a weed we fight with on our land, or a food we deem so unclean that we purposefully keep it out of our kitchens. Yet that is what we're given.

In both of these parables there are similarities. Both the mustard seed and the yeast, they are tiny. Mustard seeds aren't very big. And yeast even comes in tiny little bags. Yet in both stories, that tiny workhorse produces something much larger than itself. And even though the tiny elements were deemed useless and pointless and undesirable, when in the right environment they were transformed into life sustaining gifts. They contributed to the kingdom in powerful ways. Providing shelter and security, a home, feeding the multitudes. It's the little things that surprise us most. It's the little things we deem insignificant that we ignore and forget about.

As we began unpacking boxes and setting up our home, we began to realize we were missing something. It wasn't anything big like a sofa or a bed. We found those items right away. It wasn't even something medium in size like a lamp or tray table. No, it was something small and really, something deemed insignificant. It was the glass tray that sits at the bottom of our microwave. Yes, we had the microwave, and yes, we still used the microwave, without the tray. But every time we used the microwave, even though it did the same thing it always had done, our food wasn't as evenly cooked, parts were too hot, parts were too cold. Even when we tried manually rotating the food at various time intervals, it still wasn't cooked as well as with the small glass tray sitting in the bottom. It's the little things that sometimes make the biggest impact. It's the little things that make the big work and function better.

When I read these parables, I have to ask myself, if God can use tiny mustard seeds and a tiny amount of yeast to do really big things, imagine what God can do with us. Regardless of gender or status, age or size, it is through ordinary people like us that the kingdom is here. It's through ordinary everyday acts that the kingdom is shared and seen. The future of the kingdom is dependant upon what we do now. And the kingdom embraces those deemed unworthy and insignificant by this world. Don't let anyone tell you you can't. And don't talk yourself out of doing something you know you should do,

regardless of how small and insignificant it might seem. The lines the world applies do not apply to the kingdom of heaven. There is transforming power in the kingdom. The Holy Spirit works in us and through us to create something bigger than we could ever imagine. God's kingdom is different from this world. It is set apart. And as we've learned from these parables, there's nothing predictable about the kingdom of God. God can't be contained in a box and neither can the kingdom.

The kingdom of heaven isn't comprised of neatly planted rows, like corn and soybeans. We try to make it that way. We try to make the church neat and organized. We have statements of who we are and what we believe, doctrines. We like nice neat little rows. But the kingdom is about transformation. The kingdom is for those of us who don't have it all together, whose rows aren't in a straight line. The kingdom of heaven is made up of these little things that God transforms into something life giving. The kingdom is close, glimpses are here, with us today. The kingdom of heaven is like everyday people doing ordinary everyday things that are transformed into something life giving.

If only we had the eyes to see and the ears to hear...

### **Benediction**

BTW, you'll be relieved to know that this week we did in fact find the microwave tray. :) It's the little things.

By the power of the Holy Spirit  
God has given you gifts  
and the gift of discernment,  
choose what is good,  
and guide your feet in the way of peace.

May the God of creation, liberation, and transformation  
bless you this day and always.