

7-14-19 PARABLES OF JESUS #4 MATTHEW 13:31-32

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

Among the many things that I enjoy --- I enjoy BUILDING CAMPFIRES ... in addition to the joy of nurturing and tending a fire from a mere spark or two to a roaring blaze I enjoy staring into a well-built campfire --- soothing and stabilizing ... a good campfire re-centers me ... inspires me ... energizes me --- my hope is restored and the possibility for a better tomorrow wells up within me ... in spite of whatever discouragement, calamity, or situation that I may find myself ... a good camp-fire helps me to restore perspective and vision... passion and possibility—it settles me and I am calmed ... and I find NEW HOPE.

I believe that his week's parable, the PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED, was used & intended by Jesus for two particular reasons:

1st --- Jesus used this parable as a hinge to connect a series of 5 parables delivered in rapid succession (per Matthew 13)--- each intended to help the disciples to better understand a facet or two of the incomprehensible wonders and realities of God's heavenly kingdom ... a kingdom that we pray for when we pray, ***"thy kingdom come, thy will be done..."***

- Preceded by 2 parables about the critical importance of "sowing" and "tending" the seeds of the kingdom that those seeds may flourish (**Parable of the Sower & of the Weeds**)
- Followed by 2 parables about the incredible wonder and value of the kingdom of heaven (**Parable of the Hidden Treasure & the Pearl**)
- And then concluding with 2 parables that teach that only God will be able to discern & sort out the TRUE HEART OF THOSE WHO LOVE GOD & SEEK THE REALITY OF HIS HEAVENLY PRESENCE ---it's not our job, but God's job to determine and discern (**Parable of the Weeds & of the NET**)
NOTE: the true believer will know God, will have the love of God in their heart, and will not have any doubts that they are a child of God ...the true believer will have assurance ☺

2nd --- Jesus used this parable to encourage a discouraged lot of disciples who were coming to realize that helping to establish God's kingdom on earth was not going to be as they may have expected in the beginning ... God's kingdom, here on earth, was not going to EXPLODE onto the scene as a socio-political powerhouse that might rival the mighty Roman Empire, BUT RATHER,

that the real seeds of God's kingdom – the kingdom of heaven ... WILL START SMALL in the hearts, minds, and souls of those who believe in Jesus and who want to live accordingly ... the real 'birthing' of the 'Body of Christ' will start in the hearts & minds of Christian believers and WILL SPREAD in ways that DO NOT CONFORM to the ways of this world ... BUT WILL TAKE ROOT IN A WAY THAT THE BODY OF CHRIST --- THE COMMUNITY OF THE FAITHFUL --- THE TRUE CHURCH--- WILL GROW TO GIVE LIFE TO ALL THOSE WHO TRULY SEEK TO KNOW & EXPERIENCE GOD.

JESUS WANTED TO ENCOURAGE THE DISCIPLES (AS THEY SAW PERSECUTION AND DISSERTION DEPLETING THEIR RANKS) THAT EVERYTHING IS "ON COURSE" and "ITS GOING TO BE OK" ☺

TODAY's TEXT --- MATTHEW 13:31-33:

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is LIKE a MUSTARD SEED, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, SO THAT the birds come and perch in its branches."

TEXT & CONTEXT:

Throughout the New Testament & the Gospels, particularly in Matthew, the very presence of Jesus is associated with the Kingdom of Heaven:

- Matthew 3:2 "for the kingdom of heaven has come near"
- "kingdom of heaven" is used over 30 times in the NT and 20 of these times are found in the Gospel of Matthew

Jesus devoted a significant part of his ministry to helping people know and understand about the reality & the experience of the 'Kingdom of God' (aka kingdom of heaven)

- God's ways are not the ways of a broken world
"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, SO ARE my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9
- God's concern & priority has been and continues to be for the heart & soul of humanity --- what is on the 'inside' matters far more than what is on the outside

- Yet, as the ‘inside’ of humanity begins to reflect the heart and nature of God & the love of God ... the “outside” of humanity begins to change --- CONFORMING LESS with the world and TRANSFORMING more to the ways of God ... and more into CHRIST-LIKENESS (Romans 12:2)

Heaven and the ways of God are so beyond our earthly comprehension that human understanding & words are not enough ... HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE THE SUPERNATURE IN NATURAL TERMS?

Consider the parables that Jesus shares in Matthew 13 ---- “WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN LIKE?” and “WHAT IS THE ONE POINT THAT MAY BE THE ‘TAKE-HOME-VALUE’ of that parable?

The Parable of the Sower (13:1-23):

The Parable of the Weeds (13:24-30 & 36-43):

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (13:31-32):

The Parable of the Yeast (13:33):

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (13:44):

The Parable of the Pearl (13:45):

The Parable of the Net (13:47-51):

The Parable of the Owner’s Storeroom (13:52):

MAIN POINTS OF THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED:

1. Often good things --- big things --- start very small and grow into something very significant --- **so, HAVE HOPE --- HANG-IN-THERE - --- a better day is coming and YOU WILL BE AMAZED!**
2. Jesus, while always concerned about the ‘individual’ **IS ALWAYS ORIENTED TOWARDS the CORPORATE --- TOWARDS THE FAMILY --- TOWARDS THE BODY** God’s plan and God’s passion are for the **BODY OF CHRIST here on earth!!!!** YOU ARE A VITAL PART OF THIS BODY OF CHRIST ... YOU ARE A PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN YOU ... YOU ARE A PART OF SOMETHING QUITE INCREDIBLE --- YOU ARE A PART OF SOMETHING THAT IS ORGANIC & ALIVE!!!!

APPLICATION/CHARGE:

1. **DO NOT BE DECEIVED BY CIRCUMSTANCES OR CURRENT EVENTS --BE CLEAR MINDED!!!**
2. **DO NOT GIVE UP HOPE – DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED ---BE EXPECTANT, HAVE VISION, & BE STRONG & COURAGEOUS!!!**
3. **DO NOT FORGET THAT THE BODY OF CHRIST (the church) IS A LIVING ORGANISM ---** therefore BE CAREFUL, BE LIFE-GIVING, BE AWARE --- BE SMART and BE SELF-CONTROLLED!!!
4. **DO NOT DENY GOD’S DESIRE & DETERMINATION TO REDEEM, RESTORE, AND GIVE LIFE TO ALL PEOPLE. –** therefore BE NURTURING, BE EXTENDING, BE ENCOURAGING --- CELEBRATE EACH LITTLE STEP ... EACH LITTLE ACHIEVEMENT ... EACH LITTLE BENCHMARK ... EACH SUCCESS ... the world is certainly critical and life destroying ... so **MAY WE be LIFE GIVING...and MAY WE be POSITIVE & GIVING OF GOD’S ENERGY & LOVE!!!!**
5. **IS SHUMC A SAFE AND HEALTHY PLACE FOR THE “BIRDS OF THE AIR” TO COME AND MAKE THEIR NESTS?**

Reflections:

1. Church Tradition has typically related the Mustard Tree/Bush as being the church that was birthed in the 1st century per Christ’s Ascension & subsequent experience of Pentecost ---
+ What are some of the ways that the church has been the ‘smallest’? The most ‘distorted’?
+ What effect has this had on you?
2. What are some of the ways the kingdom of God on earth has seemed its most effective?
3. What about SHUMC seems most vital to you? What is your part in that vitality?
4. What seems to you to be the main point of the Parable of the Mustard Seed?
5. Are you feeling led to renew a commitment that you have made to God ... or to be a member of the body of Christ as it exists here at SHUMC?