

## **Pentecost 9 - Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52**

Here is a fun fact, did you know that Canada is the largest producer of the mustard seed. Producing over 186, 400 tonnes a year. Did you know that the largest miller of dry mustard in the world is in....Hamilton, Ontario. It's true. G.S. Dunn Limited is that company and up until the year 2010, the Hamilton Mustard Festival, over the labour day weekend was the largest festival of its kind. The festival celebrated the history of the mustard seed, and explained its many uses both in cooking and for medicinal purposes. The seed is of course used as a spice but its oil can also be used for such things as fabrics and fuel. I say that, it used to be the largest festival of its kind because Middleton, Wisconsin now has the largest festival celebrating this simple seed. Incidentally, national mustard day, is this coming Saturday, August 2. These facts and tidbits are always going through mind when we encounter this passage from Matthew, the first parable being that story of the mustard seed. The mustard seed is a symbol used by many Christians to represent faith and charity. A reminder that no matter how small our acts of kindness may be they can grow into great results.

In our passage from Matthew Jesus takes some everyday items and breaks them open, even invites those listening to see them in a new manner. The parables found in Matthew are often this way. Jesus tells stories of lost sheep, seeds in fields or workers in a vineyard. Jesus uses simple everyday encounters that the listeners would understand and even with which they could identify.

There is relief in the fact that even Jesus, the one most tied to God, the one most likely to be able to articulate the love of God, used simple, everyday, ordinary examples. Of course this was not because Jesus couldn't use grander language, but rather, we couldn't have understood it otherwise. In fact, most of the time the disciples ask Jesus to explain what he meant because they could not understand his meaning. Jesus made, often surprising, comparisons between that which was holy and that which was secular. Allowing us the opportunity to see things and understand things differently. As a result, in many regards, the passage we read this morning is no different from other parables because Jesus does use the ordinary to explain the extraordinary. However, unlike other parables, Jesus launches into these comparisons leaving little time for lead up or the usual Q&A. The similes and metaphors come quickly, with no warning or preparation, no explanation and certainly no story. Perhaps Jesus doesn't want those hearing him to think too much about them or get stuck on one versus another. Or perhaps Jesus is teaching us to see the kingdom of heaven in all of creation, no matter how ordinary, no matter how simple, no matter what our situation.

The comparison of the mustard seed and the yeast are easy enough. Two very basic items that aren't very impressive but the results can be astounding- a tree big enough for birds to nest in, bread enough to feed the family for days. The kingdom of heaven is like this because it is surprising, potent, and more to it than meets the eye. But then it becomes more difficult to identify the aspects of the kingdom within the

other items. Finding buried treasure is based on luck. A rich man becomes richer because he is good at his trade and knows when one pearl is better than the rest. And the final comparison makes us believe that it is not about us finding it but rather it finding us. Other than being ordinary items or strange amounts of luck these metaphors seems to have little in common, in fact some seem contrary to others.

Barbara Brown Taylor, modern day theologian extraordinaire finds a commonality. She states, “The striking thing about all these images is their essential hidden-ness- the mustard seed hidden in the ground, the yeast hidden in the dough, the treasure hidden in the field, the pearl hidden among all the others, the net hidden in the depths of the sea. If the kingdom of heaven is like these, then it is not something readily apparent to the eye but something that must be searched for, something just below the surface of things waiting there to be discovered and claimed.”

When we understand the hidden nature of all these items it sounds like kingdom of heaven is mythical, is the stuff not of the ordinary but of fairy tales. Jesus references buried treasure after all! If we look at them as items hidden, waiting to be exposed, items that are suddenly discovered and change lives then they are less ordinary. But that is the key, the kingdom of heaven only becomes the kingdom of heaven when it is revealed. These items are useless if they remain hidden, the seed does nothing if it is not buried first, the yeast is tasteless until it is placed in the dough, the treasure has no value until it is found, the pearl means nothing until someone in the know has the right

eye, the net produces nothing until it is pulled up from the sea-but when these items are used and found, their full potential is recognized

The church often uses the term seekers or searchers for those who have not “discovered” the church yet. One could easily claim that the church is like these items, it has no value to the community until it is revealed, until it is active, until it is found. I, however, also believe that we are all seeking and searching. There is no superiority between those in attendance this morning and those who are not here. It in fact does not matter where we search so long as we keep our eyes open and are willing to reveal the hidden holy within the ordinary.

If we want to speak of heavenly things, if we want to seek the kingdom of God, on earth as it is in heaven, if we want the hidden holiness to be revealed we must begin with the things we know, the church, the everyday jobs that keep this church in view, the ordinary activities that reach out to our community, the simple acts that you and I can do with and for each other. The kingdom of heaven is like all those things in plain view just waiting to reveal God’s love for all.