

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A  
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI  
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Preached during COVID-19, via Zoom

I come to you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in [their] field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree..."

Also, "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."

As I contemplated the readings for today, these two images that Jesus uses to describe the Kingdom of Heaven really stuck out to me. Now, when Jesus talks about the Kingdom of Heaven, he's not just describing a place where we go after death, and he's not just talking about some heavenly existence at the end of time. Jesus is describing the ways in which we see and experience God's present reign over all of creation. The ways in which God's will intersects with our day to day reality and calls us to live in such a way that expresses the heart of God, that is to live according to the gospel of love. So, when Jesus says things like, "the Kingdom of God is \_\_\_\_", what he's saying is these are the ways in which we recognize God's will and God's love in the world around us.

These two images, the image of the mustard seed and the image of the yeast, remind us that the ways in which we experience the heart of God at work in the world are often seemingly small and innocuous, but they have a way of growing into something mighty. I think we all see this phenomenon in our lives on a regular basis. I think about how I met my wife Elizabeth. Growing up, my best friend, Andrew, lived two hours away. Our moms were friends from college, so my family would take regular trips to visit his family. Over the years, I would hear about other friends of his, and occasionally, I'd even meet some of them. I remember a time when I started hearing about his friend Elizabeth. I met her once or twice in passing over the years, but it wasn't until the summer after they graduated high school that we ended up spending significant time together. A day together amongst mutual friends quickly grew into talking occasionally over Instant Messenger, which grew into talking for hours over Instant Messenger, and before we knew it, things blossomed into a relationship. We dated a while, and now, we'll be celebrating ten years of marriage in December. And every once in a while, we'll just look at each other, and I might say something like, "You're Andrew's friend Elizabeth", and she'll say, "You're Andrew's friend Hunter." And we smile, and we chuckle at the sheer unlikelihood that we ever ended up together. Our relationship started with the most tenuous connection, the smallest seed, but it blossomed into something wonderful. I think relationships, whether romantic or platonic, often serve as great illustration of this principle. Things have a way of growing from the smallest most unlikely sources.

Our Epistle reading kind of hints at this idea too. It talks about concepts like predestination and election, and people love to get off into the weeds with these ideas. But what those words really say at their core is simply that God chose to work through a small unlikely seed so that many could come to know God's love in the end. God chose to work through an unlikely group of people, a small nomadic tribe, who lived in a seemingly insignificant land. And later when the church formed, God worked through unlikely individuals. God did not choose to work through the mighty. God called the lowly and the downtrodden. God calls and works through the small and the unlikely.

It's in the small things and the unlikely places that we often find hope, and we desperately need a good dose of hope on occasion, but especially right now in the times that we are living through. We need hope in the face of this pandemic. We need hope in the face of the injustice that we see in our world, especially the racial injustice that we're constantly seeing in our own country. St. Marks needs hope in the face of the grief that this community is feeling over the passing of one of its cherished members.

We can find this hope, we can see these little seeds of the Kingdom if we just have our eyes open. I see it already in things like our regular worship offerings during the week. I have probably gotten to know some people through these opportunities that I never would have gotten to know very much or possibly at all if we were doing normal in person worship. We've been able to lift up the needs of our community in prayer in a special and intentional way during this time. We see small seeds of the Kingdom in the faces of each other over these Zoom calls. Also, we see small seeds of the Kingdom in the voices of young people who have started to speak out against injustice, and in things like a wall of moms linked arm and arm standing against tyranny. We can see the seeds of God's Kingdom reign all around us, even in the midst of these crazy times, if we just know what to look for. We can see evidence of the heart of God at work if we just open our eyes and pay attention. So keep your eyes open for those tiny seeds of the Kingdom and know that someday they will blossom into something beautiful. Amen.