

# 8th Sunday After Pentecost

July 26, 2020

Sermon by Rev. Zachary W. Johnson

Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church  
Pasadena, California

## Gospel: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

<sup>31</sup>[Jesus] put before [the crowds] 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.”

<sup>44</sup>“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. <sup>45</sup>“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; <sup>46</sup>on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. <sup>47</sup>“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; <sup>48</sup>when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. <sup>49</sup>So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup>and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>51</sup>“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” <sup>52</sup>And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

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## SERMON by Pastor Zach Johnson

These parables that Jesus shares with us today in the gospel are all about abundance. The first two parables, the mustard seed and the yeast, are all about how something small and insignificant can produce a mass of richness that benefits others. The parables of the hidden treasure and the fine pearl are about how priceless and amazing the Kingdom of God really is for us. But what is even more good news is the fact that these parables point out that the Kingdom of God is a reality we can enjoy here and now!

So, let's start by examining the parable of the mustard seed. The mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds in the world; yet, it can grow into a giant shrub that can be as tall as 10 feet! Not only does it branches produce a nesting place for birds, but birds also like to eat the seeds of the mustard plant. Plus, the leaves of the plant were often cooked for food. The mustard plant was also used to produce spice and medicine. This tiny, tiny seed produces so much to be given to help God's creatures.



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It is the same with the parable of the yeast. Now, yeast is actually a bad translation of the original Greek text that the New Testament was written in. A better translation would be the word leaven. What Jesus is getting at here is literally a sourdough starter kit to make bread; which, of course, has yeast in it. However, what makes this parable amazing is that Jesus is talking about a massive quantity of bread being made. You see, biblical scholars believe that 3 measures of flour in this parable equals about 40 liters of flour (that's a lot of flour!). Because of this the leaven would have to weigh about 4lbs. Now, while that seems like a lot of leaven, what it makes when combined with the flour is about 110 lbs. of bread! Four pounds of leaven grows into a mass of 110lbs. That is enough bread to feed 150 people! Again, a small amount produces so much abundance to be shared.

Now, when I think about what makes the Kingdom of God so precious and priceless, what comes to my mind is the fact that the Kingdom of God is ruled by Jesus' unconditional love for us. There is nothing more precious in all of creation than discovering that Jesus loves you and claims you as beloved. It is worth more than any riches we could ever own in this world. It so priceless because it lets us know that our true identity, the very core of who we are as a person is grounded in the fact that Christ Jesus claims us as beloved. There is nothing on this earth, no kind of labels that others may use to try and identify or separate us, that can truly tarnish the fact that we are God's beloved. And, with that, there is no greater joy we can experience in this world than loving God right back, for as God continues to shower us in love, our love for God grows in return. Not only for God, but also for neighbor as well.

But here is the interesting thing, the love God shows us isn't some bombastic showing of love, like a marriage proposal on the jumbotron at a Dodgers game. Instead, God does seemingly small things that have a huge impact, like the mustard seed and the yeast. The rest of the world may not notice all of the little things God does for us out of love, but it has the power to transform us. The rest of Pasadena may not notice our food pantry ministry, for example, but to those 60-80 people we serve every Saturday morning, it has a huge impact on their lives. It reminds them that, while the world may have forsaken them, God has not abandoned them. The death of Jesus may have seemed insignificant to the Roman world, but it was Christ's death and resurrection that saved the entire cosmos! It is now the cornerstone of our faith, and its good news draws people to God, further expanding the kingdom!

You see, what produces an abundance in God's kingdom are the small acts of love and compassion that we do in the kingdom each and every day. Sure, sometimes we do big things that have a huge impact, but a lot of the growth in the kingdom comes through what the world would see as small and insignificant. Yet, to those who receive the small act of compassion and love, it transforms them. It produces such an abundance of love in them that they begin to feel like sharing that love with others as well. These small actions have the power to feed 150 people with love!

It has become more and more clear to me that we are lacking kindness and gentleness in our country right now as a whole. Imagine how things could change if each of us were to continue finding ways to show love and compassion to all the people we encounter, even if it is digitally right now. If one person could produce



enough love to feed 150 people, imagine what impact it would have to have 50, 60, 100, people going out and spreading God's love through small acts of compassion and love.

There are a lot of Christians out there who believe that the Kingdom of God is some future reality that awaits us after we die. They are convinced that if we just keep to ourselves, and only do enough to save ourselves, we will be with God for all eternity after we die. The truth of the matter is that the Kingdom of God is actually here and now! God has freed us from sin and death to live in the kingdom right now! But God, being jealous, wants all people to be a part of the kingdom. Because of this, God also frees us to go out into our community and our world in order to draw others to God by expanding the love of God through our small actions that will yield an abundance. In doing so, we will help God show the world that the Kingdom of God is so precious and priceless it is worth more than all the riches in the world. Plus, it will transform this world to be a place of compassion and peace.

And what is the best news of all is the fact that St. Paul tells us in our Romans reading today that there is nothing, absolutely nothing in this world that can separate us from the love of Christ Jesus. This means that God will continue to add the seed of love to us so that we can grow into an abundant shrub that produces for others; that God will leaven us love, so that our love grows and grows so that we may feed 150 people with it. Even on those days where we feel a lack of love because we are going through a challenging time, Christ Jesus will remind us that we are forgiven and still loved so that we can be continually transformed. Because of this, we are indeed free to spread the love of God's kingdom through our loving actions, big or small, and watch as God grows the kingdom into a priceless abundance.

Amen.



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