

ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 7TH FEBRUARY 2021

THE PARABLES OF JESUS; THE MUSTARD SEED AND THE YEAST (LUKE 18:18-21)

Welcome and Announcements

"Hello and welcome to our 'Church at Home' service transcript for Sunday 7th February 2021. I pray that you are keeping well today as we continue through this period of lockdown." - Rev. Andrew Gill

Call to Worship – Psalm 147:7-11

Praise the Lord!

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;

make melody to our God on the lyre!

He covers the heavens with clouds;

he prepares rain for the earth;

he makes grass grow on the hills.

He gives to the beasts their food,

and to the young ravens that cry.

His delight is not in the strength of the horse,

nor his pleasure in the legs of a man,

but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him,

in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Praise the Lord!

Opening Prayer

Worthy are you, O God,

to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength,

and honour, and glory, and blessing!

Salvation belongs to our God,

who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever.

Merciful Father,
grant to your faithful people pardon and peace,
that we may be cleansed from all our sins
and serve you with a quiet mind;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Reading - Luke 13:10-21

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, 'Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.' Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, 'There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.'

The Lord answered him, 'You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?'

When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

Then Jesus asked, 'What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches.'

Again he asked, 'What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about thirty kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough.'

Sermon - 'Parables of Jesus; the Mustard Seed and the Yeast'

Have you ever wondered why Christianity seems to be having such little impact in the world around us? Sometimes the church can feel small, weak, and that the world doesn't care about what we have to say or what we believe. Or maybe in your own life, you wonder why the gospel isn't making more progress in your heart. You are praying big prayers, and expecting big things, but you see little evidence of God at work in your life. We can get discouraged and we begin to question what God is really doing in our lives and in the world.

Today we are looking at two short parables that Jesus told which remind us that while the kingdom of God might start small, it is growing to become something great, and eventually will transform absolutely everything.

Over these last few weeks, we have been looking at some of the parables that are found in the Gospel of Luke. That book begins by introducing us to Jesus as the promised King, who would bring God's kingdom of peace and his justice to the earth. The prophecies said that under King Jesus's reign evil would be defeated, people would love each other, and God would be worshipped as God. But as you read on through the gospel you begin to ask what kind of a kingdom is he actually building. Because it seems to be that the extent of his rule is to 12 followers, made up of tax collectors, fishermen, and religious fanatics. He spends his time traveling around the countryside telling stories. What kind of a kingdom is he trying to establish? Compare that to the life of Alexander the Great, who by the time he was 30 had

conquered most of the known world. But Jesus had no military power, no political clout, no financial or commercial success. Yet he did have power, he could do amazing things, but used his power to help the poor, and improve the lives of outcasts. On the surface his impact seems to be relatively small, but what is really going on? Let's look at the first of these parables, in Luke 13:18-19, *"Then Jesus asked, 'What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches.'"*

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, it starts off small but it grows into something great. Its almost as if Jesus is saying, 'Yes, these are humble beginnings, but they are just the beginnings. Something amazing is going to come out of what I am starting with these 12 disciples.' We see things like this all the time in our world too. Amazon, Disney, and Apple are three of the biggest companies in the world. And they all started off life in a garage! But what Jesus' intention here is more than just to give inspiration to entrepreneurs during the lean years. He's talking about the kingdom of God. If you ever tried to grow a mustard seed, you will know that it doesn't typically grow into a tree, normally it grows into a shrub. So what Jesus is saying here is that not only is the growth great, but the growth is unexpected and surprising. This mustard seed grows into a tree, and the birds come and make a nest in it's branches. This is probably picking up on imagery that we see in the Old Testament, that the prophets used to describe how the nations would be invited and brought into the kingdom of God. As Jesus' kingdom grows, it does not displace people, it embraces them. It gives the nations a place of safety, security, and a real home.

Humble beginnings, but amazing growth. This is the way that we should expect God to work, so do not get discouraged or frustrated if things start small. But do not fail to expect things to grow into something amazing either. After the resurrection, the church consisted of 11 men in a room, hiding, and terrified with the doors locked. But on the day of pentecost, the Apostles,

filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, preached about Jesus, and the church grew to 3,000! Then day by day, through their faithful witness, more and more people were added. And people kept on being added. And that small church started to grow, and expand beyond Jerusalem, out into Judea, into the neighbouring Samaria. Then as time went on it moves on into Asia, into Europe, into Africa. We see it infiltrating it's whole way through the Roman empire, until the Emperor himself becomes a Christian. And still the church grows, and grows, and grows. Today there are estimated over 2 billion Christians from almost every single country in the world. It started off so small, but it is growing into something amazing, and it's still not finished!

Let's look at the next parable in verse 20, *“Again he asked, ‘What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about 30 kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough.’”* This parable moves from the garden into the kitchen, where we find a woman baking bread, and lots of it. She takes just a pinch of yeast, and puts it into the mixture. The yeast cannot even be seen anymore, yet it begins to work through the whole of the dough causing it to rise, and transforming it completely. That is how the kingdom of God works in our world, unseen and subtly, but constantly active, transforming society. This should encourage us, and inspire us to pray not only that we see our church grow, but that we have a transformational impact on our community for the better.

See the future of our world is not separate to the future of our church. In fact the destiny of the world is the fulfilment of the church. Revelation 7:9-19, *“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb... and they cried out in a loud voice; ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”* This shows us where all history is heading. It is moving towards Jesus sitting on a throne, being worshipped by a multitude of people that is beyond counting.

That is what the kingdom of God is growing towards, so do not let small stop you. Do not get discouraged by a humble beginning, or a shaky restart. Sometimes, we think that unless we can do something big for God, then he doesn't want us to do anything. And we say, 'Oh, I'd love to do something just amazing for God, but I'm too old now' or, 'I'm too young' or, 'I have too many family commitments right now' or, 'I'm just an ordinary person, I have no special gifts or abilities' or, 'I just don't have enough resources, or even if I wanted to, in the middle of a pandemic I just don't have the opportunities to be able to do things.'

But don't let the small stop you. No step forward is too small if it is done in obedience to God. No act of kindness is irrelevant if it is done out of love. No act of service is insignificant if it is done to glorify God. No prayer is ever too simple if it is offered in faith to God. Don't let the small stop you, because from small beginnings, great things can grow. From subtle growth, transformation can happen.

The kingdom of God is not about politics, it's not about places, it's about people. It grows in people, and through people. It transforms individual lives, and through that person it influences those that are around them. So how is the kingdom growing today in you, and through you? The kingdom of God started humbly, but it's future is glorious. So today, don't let the small stop you.

Prayer

*Heavenly Father,
you are the King of kings, and the Lord of Lords. I thank you for sending Jesus to establish your eternal kingdom. I'm sorry for the times that I doubt your sovereignty, and rebel against your rule. Please forgive me. Plant your Spirit in my life, grow your kingdom in me, and through me. Show me the small things I can do today, to serve you, and love others. May your kingdom come. Amen*