

Proper 12
Mt. 13.31-33, 44-52
Sermon by Rev. Chip Graves

Christian writer, Philip Yancey describes God's given grace, "There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. And there is nothing we can do to make God love us less." And therefore, we walk in the light of Christ, supporting our brothers and sisters on this earth not because it enhances our position with God but because it shows our appreciation for all that God has done for us. In essence, we've been called as Christians to respond to God's grace, to live in the gospel of Christ, loving and serving our neighbor.

This past week I've returned from a two week Ghana, Africa mission trip. And as I've discerned our gospel lesson for today, I've seen many similarities with my journey. In our lesson today, Jesus gives us parables from which to better understand the vastness of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus shares with us that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, starting as the smallest of seeds and growing to an enormous size. This parable gives us hope; that something so small can become something so vast.

Although many believe that death is the doorway to the kingdom of God, I believe that we can witness God's kingdom here and now. Allow me to share such an example. Fifteen years ago, our rector Tom O'Dell along with several St. John's parishioners took a trip to visit an Anglican priest, Father Joe, in a tiny village in northern Ghana. Who knew this journey would blossom into the multi-faceted, successful non-profit organization that we know today as Kimoyo. And yet Kimoyo started as a mustard seed; so very small.

During my mission trip this past month, I was allowed to witness first hand the many wonderful programs that have begun through Kimoyo; a new medical facility capable of serving hundreds of patients each month; a new elementary school for 80 young children, where education is a luxury not a given; a new micro-loan program for women, allowing them to start small businesses to better support their children; and a farm project managed by Father Joe for the surrounding community.

As we continue within our gospel passage, Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven as a hidden treasure within a field and as a fine pearl; both parables show us the significance in 'selling all that we have' and buying into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, I believe we have been called to invest in the kingdom of heaven. And it's right here in front of us. Look at all the possibilities we have here at St. John's; the many programs we can attach our lives to; and the many people we can serve in Christ.

Though one program is neither better nor worse than any other here at St. Johns' I feel compelled to share my latest mission trip to Africa through Kimoyo. As we all know, it is possible to tithe through time or money. And I'm asking you today for both. I'm asking you to spend time, a small amount of time supporting any one of our outreach programs.

Everyone needs to become involved. And you can just pick one. For example with Kimoyo, you could support one of many subcommittees such as marketing, business development or fundraising; you could spend time in assisting our teachers locally educating children on the significance of multi-cultural opportunities; or you could volunteer at the Binaba shop.

With regard to financial support, your small donations could help us develop new micro-loans for African women, allowing them to better support their families, ensuring that their children can attend school; or your donation could help continue the growth of the Zebilla village medical center, still in great need of new medical equipment and supplies. In essence, the mustard seed of Kimoyo has begun to grow, not yet in full bloom. The treasure has been found, just needing your commitment.

In sum, this message today is not just about supporting Kimoyo but a request for help. I'm asking you to get involved, St. John's. I'm asking you today to pick one program and get involved. It could be Community Living Club; it could be Tuesday Morning Outreach; it could be Community Youth Program; it could be getting involved with Elm Street Manor or any one of our many outreach programs. But I ask you today *to get involved*.

As we come to a close, we review the gospel lesson where Jesus again conveys a new parable, explaining that the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea catching fish, keeping the good fish, throwing out the bad. As the fishermen judge the quality of the fish, God watches over us. And though we cannot buy our way or work our way into the kingdom of heaven, we can know that we are called to respond to God's grace – to love one another. And therefore we ask ourselves, 'How will we respond to God's grace? What is it that we can do today to help someone? Which outreach program at St. John's will we support? *I ask that you pick one and go for it!*
Amen.