

“The Kingdom of God is Like...A Mustard Seed”

Matthew 13:31-32

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I have the privilege of teaching a Bible Study Class on Wednesday night. We are studying the Gospel of Mark. This week we were having a lot of laughter and amazingly got off on a tangent---not at all unusual for me or this group. I shared a story that popped into my head. And well, I didn't know until I was doing sermon prep on Thursday that it just might be appropo for today. I changed it a little since Wednesday night.

A man arrives at the gates of heaven. St. Peter asks, "Church?"

The man says, "Baptist."

St. Peter looks down his list and says, "Go to Room 24, but be very quiet as you pass Room 8."

Another man arrives at the gates of heaven. "Church?"

"Lutheran."

"Go to Room 18, but be very quiet as you pass Room 8."

A third man arrives at the gates. "Church?"

"Presbyterian."

"Go to Room 11, but be very quiet as you pass Room 8."

The man says, "I can understand there being different rooms for different denominations, but why must I be quiet when I pass Room 8?"

St. Peter tells him, "Well, the Methodists are in Room 8, and they think they're the only ones here."

Oh beloved....on this World Wide Communion Sunday we celebrate that there is oneness around the world regardless of denominations. It is not about bylaws, polity, and policy...it is about a faith and relationship in Jesus Christ regardless of your denomination. I have been a Methodist all of my life. My parents were Methodists, my Grandparents were Methodists. I have chosen to be a Methodist because I like its theology and belief system. However....we can make too much out of denominations.

I hate saying this but being a Methodist doesn't make you a Christian. Oh....if you remember you membership vows....it should because we clearly ask our members about your faith and trust in Jesus. But sometimes I believe we develop a sense of "churchianity" rather than "Christianity."

So today is World Communion Sunday where are Christians around the world that will be taking the bread and the cup communion with the Lord and each other reminding all of us that it is not about denominations but it is about the One who died on the cross for us. There is an estimated 2.1 Billion people in the world that say they are a Christian. 247 million of them are in the United States. (2010 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life)

So this is the last of the sermons on The Kingdom of God is Like...series where we have explored parables of Jesus. Next week we begin a new sermon series entitled FAQ, Frequently Asked Questions. We will begin the sermon series with the Frequently Asked Question: How Do I Know God's Will?

Today is a short parable about a Mustard Seed and how a grain of Mustard Seed is like the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven. Although a Mustard Seed may not be the smallest of seeds in that day and time it was readily known for its small size. Here is the size of a mustard seed **(image)**

Compared to the size of your hand you can barely find it. **(image)**

So someone might ask, "How big is a Mustard Seed?" **(image)** Glad you asked.

A mustard seed is 1.250 millimeters in diameter. That is 3/64 of an inch or the inch size in decimals would be .0492126. The circumference of a mustard seed is 3.221 millimeters or 1/8th of an inch. It weighs .002 grams or in pounds, in case you want to know, is .00000440924523 pounds. It is itty bitty.

And yet in this parable Jesus says that this little seed, this little grain will grow larger than all the garden plants and become a tree. **(image)** They could grow from 8-15 feet tall. What?! From that little seed something as huge as a tree 15 feet tall....yes, from that little seed.

Such is the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is bigger than this church; is bigger than Methodism, the Kingdom of God is far reaching. This tree and its branches allow for a source of food, rest and shelter.

However did you notice the aspect about the birds? It says this Mustard Seed grows to the point of a tree and "the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." Now last week we preached from this same chapter, Matthew 13: 18-23. And in that parable birds were mentioned as well. The birds represented "the evil one/Satan" who would come and snatch the seed as it fell on the path, on the highway...it couldn't penetrate and sink in. So we have birds mentioned here in this parable as well.

If the Kingdom of God is like a little Mustard Seed and grows into a large tree...then why would the evil one/birds make nests in the branches of the Kingdom of God? Beloved the evil one is going to get in and nest like a bird anywhere he can.

We are under attack. The church is under attack. Satan will use anything he can to destroy, demoralize and defeat the church. Satan will use small things to get the Church off focus.

Many years ago I was a guest preacher. I was a student in Seminary. After the service there was a called Church meeting. I had a leader come up to me and said they thought the sermon was good I guess, but they couldn't pay attention because they were thinking about the meeting afterwards. I stayed for the meeting afterwards. Let me tell you what it was about. They had a public church meeting because they thought the pastor's wife was using too much electricity at the parsonage---the church owned home. Lord help us.

In one church I was nearly slapped....hand us ready to pop me in the face....because a person disagreed with something that I had done. Another time I was severely chastised for moving a piece of furniture that I didn't know I was not supposed to move. I've seen a layperson get up and berate a group because someone brought the wrong eating utensil to a potluck. I've seen a person pound a table at a church meeting and yell because they didn't like what was being said and they wanted to get their point across.

Beloved, I believe it is times like these that Satan likes to get a foothold. We may disagree (and beloved don't let your mind go wondering....there are no major disagreements or anything going on like that), but I am speaking specifically general. THE church, PHUMC Church, the Church of Jesus Christ, cannot allow these birds of discontent and negativity and evil spread their wings and disrupt who and what the church is called to be...whether it is now or in the future. There may be differences of opinions but we need to have the Unity and the same mind that is in Christ Jesus. Can I get an Amen?

I really like Alfred Hitchcock movies. Sarah will not like me talking about this movie; because it gave her nightmares she said when she was young. In 1963 there was the Hitchcock movie The Birds. The birds begin vicious attacks (**image**) and survival becomes the main thing.

Friends the church, the Kingdom of God is going to be attacked, but it will survive. However we need to do all we can to keep the birds away. Shoo the birds out of here. Get thee behind me Satan. It has been said, (sometimes attributed to theologian Martin Luther), "You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building a nest in your hair." Are you with me?

And so the Church, worldwide is being attacked. The United States State Department says that Christians in more than 60 countries face persecution from governments because they believe in Jesus. More than 7100 Christians were killed in 2015 for "faith related reasons" up from 3000 from the previous year....as reported by Open Doors USA in a CNN report. (Christian Persecution Reached Record High in 2015 Report Says, January 17, 2016, CNN, William J. Cadigan)

Oh, but beloved, we sang it earlier in the song, "This Is My Father's Word." "This is my Father's world; O let me ne'er forget that thought the wrong seems oft so strong, GOD is the ruler yet. This is my Father's world: why should my heart be sad? The Lord is King; let the heaven's ring! God reigns; let the earth be glad." (words Maltbie D. Babcock)

The Kingdom of God...like a mustard seed. So tiny...and yet grows rapidly and encompasses the world. We are told in **Mark 16:15** “**Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone.**” (New Living Translation) Yes, the entire world. (image)

There is an old story that takes us back in time and recounts the time when Jesus slips back into heaven after He had died on the cross and rose from the dead. In the story the angel Gabriel met Jesus. Gabriel frowned when he saw the marks of Jesus’ scars of His tortuous years on earth, especially the scars of His crucifixion. Gabriel said: “Master, you suffered terribly for those down on earth.” “Yes, I did,” was Jesus’ reply.

Gabriel continued: “Do they all know now about your life and your forgiveness? Have they all heard about your death and resurrection?” “No, not yet.” Said Jesus. “Right now only a handful knows. Only a handful of people in Palestine know about my death and resurrection.” Gabriel looked perplexed. “Then,” he asked, “Well... How will everyone find out about your wonderful life and your sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection?” “What arrangements did you make for speaking the good news and for carrying on the work which you have begun?” Do you have a plan?”

And Jesus said, “I have asked Peter, James, John and a handful of friends and followers to tell other people about it. Those others will tell still others, and so the work will go on until the whole world knows.”

Still frowning, the angel responded: “But, hmmm, you know how people are on earth. What if they... What if Peter, James and John get tired? What if they tell the story and then the next generation gets all involved in other pursuits? What if way down in the 18th or 21st century, people aren’t committed any longer to your commission? Have you made other plans?”

Jesus looked directly at the angel of God and said: “I have no other plan. I am counting and depending on them.” (adapted Author Unknown).

Be Talk Do

BE Kingdom People

TALK Kingdom Issues

DO Kingdom things.

Seek First the Kingdom of God.
Thy Kingdom Come...Thy will be done.
For God So loved the world.....
The Kingdom of God is Like.....

(Video: The Mustard Seed)