

Jesus put before the crowds another parable: *“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 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.”*

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.”*

“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.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. “Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” 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.”

The kingdom of heaven is like...

Jesus once again uses parables to speak to the people to remind them that God is near, that they need ears to hear—and invites the people into a short story that makes them and us think. How is it that God is with them?

The first two parables are about growth. The tiny mustard seed grows to a great shrub—big enough that the birds can nest in its branches. We recognize this, perhaps even looked at the tiny mustard seed as a child. The tiny seed becomes a reminder that what seems so small and insignificant grows amazingly large. God’s reign—seemingly invisible—is right here and grows! But wait—no one would actually plant a mustard seed; it would disturb a good field because the mustard tree would quickly take over the ground. Jesus uses a parable about the growth of God’s love and justice, but it disrupts somehow—can even this weed be part of the amazing growth of the God’s household?



Mustard shrub

The little bit of leaven or yeast that is “hidden” in 60-80 pounds of flour would seem to be a good thing. In the time of Jesus however, this little bit of yeast hidden in the flour would not be a good thing. Yeast in this case probably means that the flour is corrupted. It would have had the potential to bubble up, making the huge amount of flour not usable—and yet, the little, even hidden, has grown unexpectedly and a lot. Next week we will hear how Jesus feeds the people. Does Matthew perhaps remind us that Jesus is about healing, feeding, and serving all of God’s people? Perhaps in these parables Jesus is suggesting that God works in mysterious ways using the unexpected, even the things and people that we might reject?

What treasure is buried in the field? What will we do, what will we give, as we find our hearts on fire with the love of God and the power to serve like Jesus? How do we describe this joy? Where have we experienced this bit of joy in our lives? How have we let it grow in our hearts? Jesus also speaks to the merchants who recognize the value of different things and reflects on the power to sell all to gain the pearl of great price. This is also disruptive. What is this kingdom, this household of God that invites us all to be in relationship with one another?

In the next parable we hear that the net catches the good and the bad fish—but the sorting by the angels is not to happen until the end of the age. Are we to wait and live together good and bad—all loved by God, discovering the that God is moving in unexpected ways to open a way for us to see a new way of living together?

We also hear from Paul in the letter to the Christian community in Rome. It is a reminder to us all that God is with us now. God is with us in this pandemic; God is with us in our joys; God is with us in our sorrows; God is with us in our feelings of isolation and loneliness; God is with us in our sickness; God is with us in our work for justice; God is with us in our prayer.

Are the words written in your heart?

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 8:39