



Ho, hum! I've heard these parables so many times before- what new do they have to teach me today? After all, these parables were said in times quite different than today- so while it's important to understand their place in history, it is also important to consider how and what they mean to us today. Relevant: are they still relevant?

David Lose, President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, says that "Jesus' parables remind us that the faith we preach and the kingdom we

announce finally isn't an intellectual idea but an experience, an experience of the creative and redemptive power of God that continues to change lives. And sometimes the only way to get beyond our head and into our hearts is to, as Emily Dickenson advised, 'Tell all the truth but tell it slant'. And so parables come at us sideways, catching us by surprise to take our breath away at the beauty and depth of God's promises."¹ *Let those who have ears, listen.*

What am I holding (mint) – does anyone know what it is? Can anyone guess why I might have brought some mint when talking about these parables? Mint is an invasive species. If you plant it, it will grow- and grow- and grow. I remember the first time I planted mint when we lived in Dallas. I did not realize the differences between planting it in a fully-enclosed bed in Southern California and planting it in an open garden space in Dallas.

Well, it grew, and it grew and it had no respect for where the garden ended and where the lawn started. It grew underneath and into the grass. Now, the nice part was when Scott mowed, the mint got mowed and it smelled really wonderful. The hard part was pulling it up and hoping you got all the runners so the mint stayed where it was supposed to. Not always successful.

God's realm is a bit like mint- or mustard- or yeast – or the parable of the pearl of great price. Unexpected. Not always content to stay "safe" within the boundaries we set. Popping up here and there – and when we try to cut it down or prune it back, sometimes we are lucky enough to smell the goodness of the Lord and reconsider the boundaries we have set for where it is acceptable to see God's realm or to help it come to be.

in Biblical times mustard was hated by farmers because it was one of their invasive species.

¹ http://www.davidlose.net/2014/07/pentecost-7a-parables-that-do-things/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+DavidLose%2FIsqE+%28...In+the+Meantime%29 (July 25, 2014)

So for Jesus to use this tiny seed growing into a bush (or a tree) and to use it in a positive way was startling to those who heard it. How can something that a farmer tried hard to eradicate be used as a metaphor for the realm of God?

And yeast – usually portrayed in the Bible, and even by Jesus- as not wanted, not good. That view of yeast comes from the Exodus story when the Israelites were told not to wait for the bread to rise. Rather, take the unleavened bread and flee.

The Jewish festival of Unleavened Bread is a 7 day period and is prepared for by going through the house from top to bottom and taking everything out of the house that has leavening in it. Salad dressings, spice mixtures and many more things. Just like someone learning how many things have gluten in them- you will learn how many foodstuffs have leaven in them!

Anyone who has made a starter for sourdough bread knows that it is process of starting with a little flour and yeast and then adding in and taking out until the yeast and the other materials grow into the necessary starter which gives sourdough its wonderful taste and texture. It is a process that when done grows from what is essentially rot. Any of you who like blue cheese or some of the other smelly cheeses probably know that what gives the flavor, the depth, to the cheese is mold. Not something we usually encourage!

Yeast, though, in the Bible generally represents sin – and once sin is in our life, it can be difficult to get it out. Ask anyone who has tried to change a habit that is not healthful how difficult it is to change your actions into life-enhancing habits.

So both mustard seeds and yeast are most often seen as not desirable and not wanted items. Why would Jesus use these as examples of what grows into God's realm?

Perhaps because they caused the people of the time to stop and think about what they meant when they talked about God's realm come to earth. In the Lord's Prayer, we say: "Thy kingdom come, they will be done, in heaven and on earth." The realm of God is not limited to heaven. It is intended to be here on earth as well.

If things despised were held up by Jesus as metaphors for where the realm of God might break in, where might we see it today? Likening God's realm to mustard seeds or yeast probably doesn't have a lot of meaning to most of us today. Most of us experience mustard seed in a safe glass bottle or metal container that resides in our spice rack- not a threat to our garden. Most of us experience yeast in a bright yellow packet that we carefully pour into a cup of warm water and wait for it to work its magic and bubbles to form so that bread will rise and we eagerly anticipate that warm bread with lots of butter or honey. Not exactly a picture of something unwanted!

Think about where and when you have been surprised when someone helped another with no thought or expectation of a return. Who last surprised you with grace or courtesy or simple

action in response to a need? Those instances may just be our contemporary examples of God's realm breaking through in unexpected places and ways. Or maybe somebody did something nice for someone you just walked past and didn't even notice the need. Maybe you were a little embarrassed and thought: next time, I'll do that. Wasn't that nice of the other person.

The parable of the pearl of great price and the full to overflowing fishing nets are also reminders that God is at work in our lives in ways we may not expect. God responds with abundance – not simply enough, but abundance. More than enough and sometimes even more than we can deal with. God gives because God loves.

In Paul's Letter to the Romans, we read the famous passage about the belief that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. We read it yesterday at Tom Campbell's Memorial Service. It is a favorite passage when we are grieving because it reminds us that while life is changed, life is not over. We can find comfort in the love that cannot be diminished let alone removed simply because our circumstances change. The love of God for each one of us is limitless and without any boundaries.

The love of God might be like that mustard seed, or the yeast, or even this piece of mint- it doesn't know where to stop. This week, be alert to places and ways in which others are showing the love of God by actions that don't expect a return. Be alert to the many ways in which nature nurtures us and astounds us with beauty. And maybe remember the mustard seed or the yeast- that which seems little but may have great impact.

Mint: it won't be bound by our garden fences. It pops up in unexpected places and in unexpected ways. And it is great here-and-now metaphor for how and when the realm of God is come to earth. *Let all who have ears, listen. And all who listen, act. Amen.*