

Heart Seeds of the Kingdom
Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

In today's Gospel, Jesus is talking about The Kingdom of Heaven and what it's like. The Kingdom of Heaven. Before I came to St A's, I thought the Kingdom of Heaven was far off, way in the future, a place to describe where I go when I die. What I learned at St A's is that the Kingdom of Heaven has an ALREADY AND NOT YET, a BOTH-AND quality to it.

The Kingdom of Heaven is...NOT YET! Yes: it does have a vast and eternal future to it But: the Kingdom of Heaven is ALREADY HERE. Near. With us. Right here. Right now. Holy Guacamole! That nearness—being right here, right now—that blew me away.

Years back, the Sunday School kids created a vast mural to help them wrestle with, What does this mean — the Kingdom of Heaven? What's it like? The kids created a mural of a huge growing garden. A garden filled with small creatures and big plants. The garden came alive with all of the ways that the *Kingdom Comes* to earth. The kids created small things to populate the Garden. Like the Ladybug of Joy. The Lighting Bug of Trust. The Grasshopper of Freedom.

Flowers populated their garden. Flowers bursting with each Kingdom quality. Qualities written on the flowers like: Compassion Respect. Goodness. Friendship. Love, Peace. Patience. Qualities that flower in our lives, too—as we receive this Goodness, and share it with others.

Here are some fun numbers: The phrase, “Kingdom of God” appears at least 52 times in the New Testament Gospels. The phrase, “Kingdom of Heaven”—specific to Matthew—appears at least 31 times in Matthew's Gospel.

The Kingdom of Heaven—as Jesus describes “what it's like”—in diverse, poetic and sometimes very strange, very disturbing ways—becomes a prominent centerpiece of Jesus' ministry. Jesus is not giving out easy, neat and fast answers to precisely define what it is, what it's like.

Jesus repeats this story about the Kingdom of Heaven because he wants us to wrestle with it. To wrestle with the “So What?” of the Kingdom of Heaven. Why does it matter? How can this Kingdom of Heaven transform our lives and our world? He repeats it because he wants us to remember.

The ways I **repeat** as a parent when my child was young – like put away your toys, clean your room or wash your hands. That’s nagging. What Jesus is doing in **repeating** the Kingdom of Heaven is a “holy, sacred” nagging. A nagging at the doorway of my heart. Inviting me to open the door. To cross the threshold—by doing small actions with great, abundant love. As small and as loving as being kind, planting a seed of hope, watching it grow.

I’d also love to think that Jesus speaks so much about the Kingdom of Heaven because he’s always being peppered with questions—by the deeply skeptical, the confused, the curious—as curious as little kids—wondering and asking: *What’s it like? this Kingdom of Heaven? Tell us more!* It’s as-if Jesus is inviting us in. Saying to us: Come and See. Listen. Learn. Let me tell you a story.

Jesus describes the Kingdom of Heaven in the story-form of **parables**. A parable can be a curious thing. A parable is a concise, short simple story—to point to a moral or spiritual truth. Jesus uses parables in fully expansive, imaginative and creative ways. To fire imagination. To imagine a surprising reality far beyond our ordinary expectations. Meant to shock us and invite us in. This is what parables *do*. That’s what they’re *for*. For any of you that remember algebra: remember the parabola? A parabola looks like **the letter U**. The word *parabola* and the word *parable* share a common Greek root word – Parabolē. Meaning: “a side by side comparison,” or “a juxtaposition.” What-if we can imagine the mash-up between the parabola, and the word parable is...remember how the parabola looks like the letter U? Maybe Jesus’ parables are inviting U in, to discover where, and how, **U fit into the equation**

Jesus’ parable today about the Kingdom of Heaven, what it’s like...begins by using ordinary and small things U can find in our world. Like a mustard seed. Like yeast.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like...a small mustard seed. A mustard seed, alone...stays a mustard seed. The mustard seed, to grow into something else, needs something else. The seed transforms as its outer and protective shell breaks and cracks open and grows; and works within its ecosystem-community of soil, water, sunlight.

Mustard seeds in our world—and yes, there are exceptions—but *usually* the mustard seed doesn’t grow into a mighty tree. And yet: the mustard seed, like the Kingdom of

Heaven, has a multivalent quality to it. It's medicinal. It can be used to create delicious mustard. AND: it's a weed. A weed that cannot be stopped. It spreads far and wide. In the math of our world, the mustard seed can grow into a three-foot tall plant or a shrub. God's math is different from our math. In God's Kingdom, as we participate by receiving and doing the small, mustard-seed like work of Love—God multiplies. God's multiplying power transforms the tiny seed into a surprising tree. A tree big and strong enough so that the birds of the air—and by extension, us, too—can find shelter and a home.

Next image. The Kingdom of Heaven is like: Yeast. If yeast is alone, if yeast doesn't work with something else, yeast remains yeast. The yeast, to make something else, needs something else. As we meet God in this in-breaking Kingdom, the work of our small hands kneading the yeast with flour to make the dough—is transformed...as the yeast works with the surprising, abundant three measures—or about 40-60 pounds of flour—which would produce enough daily bread to feed a village.

I remember in the height of COVID, where life's ordinary staples—like toilet paper, like yeast—were completely absent from store shelves. Many of you who are bread bakers came up with the old-new way to make bread rise. Remember sourdough starters? That took time. Imagination. Patience. It's as-if the Kingdom of Heaven can arrive and transform us, too. In fast, imaginative and in slow, patient ways.

The Kingdom of Heaven, then, can be small things that you can find in our world. Small things that work with Something Else, to become Something Else. Small things increased by God's Big Power of Love. The Small that breaks into our world can be as small as a newborn baby, held in The Mother's Hands. Resting in a manger in Bethlehem.

Getting back to the Sunday School kids' mural. The garden had Soil. Resting under the soil were HEART SEEDS! Seeds in the shape of BIG RED HEARTS! Each heart seed was inscribed with each child's name, written in the child's own handwriting. Those little heart seeds, to grow into something else, need something else. The heart seeds, and us, too—need each other. We need the soil of community. The water of hope. The sunlight of faith. The trust that God gives the GROWTH.

The kids' mural reminds me that this Kingdom is like a huge garden. Planted, planting, growing...now and in the future. Drawing near, as we imitate Christ. Here: within these four walls of this church. Here: as we show up and blossom in the world by flowering in Compassion. Decency. Kindness. Love.

In God's multiplying power, may our heart seeds crack open. Transform. And grow. Together. May our words and actions become the mustard seed, the yeast that God uses to transform the world...as we live into this "threshold space" between this world and the next — In the Always Unfolding Story. In The Garden of ALREADY AND NOT YET.