

**The Second Sunday after Pentecost
Church of the Holy Comforter
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June 14, 2009**

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God?”

Jesus asks and of course answers his own question. He has already made one comparison: “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

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Jesus answer to his own question is this: “It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God?”

The parable of the seeds is found only in Mark’s Gospel. It points to the growth of God’s Kingdom as Divine mystery rather than as the result of human accomplishment.

We do not understand how the Kingdom works – it is like seed growing while we sleep. We do not understand much about the Kingdom at all – it is a mystery that reveals God is at work in God’s Kingdom.

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God?

Can we draw our own examples of the kingdom?

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God?

It is like a Chinese farmer out in the country digging a well and pulling up buckets of dirt – only to empty a bucket that contains, not dirt, but the terracotta head of a an ancient warrior.

When officials and archeologists examine the discovery further, a great treasure is unearthed – one of the largest ancient archeological discoveries in the entire world is eventually uncovered. Eight thousand, life-size figures and weapons and horses are found.

Maybe that is what the Kingdom is like.

What was once just a rural area outside Xian China is now the destination of six million tourists a year.

The terracotta army – this huge and awesome monument to the first emperor that united China – is one of the most popular and visited sites in the world. It was built in the years 230 – 210 B.C.

You may have been to China and seen this – even if you haven’t, I bet that most of us have seen pictures, perhaps read articles about the ‘terra cotta army’ --- am I right?

You can have your picture made with the farmer that made the discovery – one dollar, American!

But the example works doesn't it? Something starting very small results in something big, and the folks involved are often unaware of what is happening.

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It is like a man who finds himself in the throws of addiction and one day says “God help me.” – just a simple gesture --- which he keeps repeating daily and then one day, thirty-one years later, looks back and sees that life is abundant and good and that the grace of God has saved him and his loved ones from the hell of dependency.

Jesus taught in parables. His hearers did not always understand – in fact it seems from scripture – that they rarely understand – which is why the text says that Jesus would explain things to his followers in private.

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God?”

Several things are clear:

The Kingdom of God is about God's doing --- not our own.

The Kingdom of God is often unseen and not understood.

The Kingdom of God doesn't come with ‘shock and awe.’

The Kingdom of God is mystery but very real.

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Jesus teaches in parables... parables demand a lot from the listener. They are not simple little stories told in order that everyone might understand.

In fact we know that everyone does not understand.

One writer says that Jesus' use of parables is not surprising because Jesus himself is a parable.

Jesus as the presence of God is certainly not obvious to everyone. He spoke of himself as light, a lamp, of things revealed and as things hidden.

There seems to be a good news/bad news scenario going on. The Kingdom of God is happening – it is real -- it is going on. We did not make it happen nor do we keep it going.

Why?

It is God's Kingdom --- not ours.

Does this mean that God is not present in our efforts or that we have nothing to do with the Kingdom?

No, no, no...

It doesn't mean that at all.

What it means is that we should be more attentive to one another and to our own hearts. It means that we should use our physical resources in the proportion that God has given them to us. We have one mouth and two ears. We need to listen more and talk less.

You see the Kingdom is ever present. Our job is to find it – to discover it – to uncover it.

Our job is to be prepared for surprises by unlikely bearers of the Kingdom.

We can't do that if we are spending our time and energy defending, convincing, blaming, and criticizing one another.

What we need to know is that the Kingdom will often fly in the face of prevailing norms. It will always fly in the face of the scapegoat blame game we see and hear in so much political discourse.

Remember the Kingdom usually starts with something small -- - seeming inconsequential.

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It is like the time when the popular student sits down at the table with the new foreign student, or the time when she seeks out that ‘different’ student that others avoid, or worse, make fun of and criticize.

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We can compare it to the time when “I am sorry” restored a relationship that became very significant in our life.

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It is like getting to know someone who is in a disdained class --- say a child who is an undocumented immigrant, and suddenly realizing that stereotyping her people is sinful and wrong.

Or like getting to know someone whose sexual orientation is different and becoming aware that this a person with the same hopes and aspirations as you --- this is a good person and

suddenly the demonizing of this group no longer makes sense and indeed is cruel and unkind.

The kingdom of God will always be characterized by justice, mercy, forgiveness and compassion. It will never involve violence, prejudice and hatred. You see, the Kingdom of God is the kingdom of love.

That is right; God's kingdom will always be characterized by love – not the love of cheap sentimentality but the profound love of self-giving sacrifice – the kind of love we find in the life of the one who taught in parables.

The one who might say to us today, “...go out and do something small – you never know what God might do with it!”