



July 26, 2020
The Eighth Sunday of Pentecost
The Rev. Emily Williams Guffey, Rector

In this Gospel we hear a cascade of parables, of metaphors for the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven...one after the other.

I would like to spend time this morning with two of them, the first two, those of the mustard seed and of the yeast.

Both of them, famously, are so small, and we immediately wonder: How can a mustard seed (which is the smallest of seeds it is said), how can yeast (which we can barely feel when we hold it in our hand) make any kind of difference? What is this amazing transformation that takes place when the mustard seed interacts with the soil and the water and the light...this amazing transformation that occurs when the yeast interacts with the flour and the water and salt?

And what is the Kingdom of God then if it has to do with these tiny transformative and transforming things?

I also want to consider another aspect of both the seeds and the yeast. And that is that they were unwanted. At best, of course, being so small, they were unrecognized. But in addition to that they were unwanted.

For think about it. Farmers of that day, nor really of this day, they were not growing rows and rows of mustard crops. Right? Mustard was a weed. It was not planted deliberately. It, like other seeds, would have been carried through the air, inadvertently mixed in with the valuable seeds that would be to wheat, grapes, fruit, vegetables. Nobody deliberately planted mustard seeds.

In fact if they happened to see any somehow, they would discard them. And yet suddenly the fast growing mustard plant would all of a sudden emerge as this giant shrub and before you knew it, there would be birds making nests in its branches, much to the chagrin of the farmers.

Similarly, in that culture, yeast was unwanted. It was at that time considered to bear impurities. It was considered to be impure and thus it was avoided in baking. For, of course, to eat it would lead to greater and greater impurity.

The mustard seed and the yeast, both so tiny and unwanted.

How fascinating it is that the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, is like a mustard seed, is like yeast. The eternal in the temporal, the sacred in and of the profane is actually among the “othered” — the “unmattered” to borrow a phrase from Bishop Rob Wright of Atlanta.

This is no abstract thing. Jesus constantly was telling parables in everyday situations, — gardening, baking, fishing, running a business — because the Kingdom of God is actually among us. The Kingdom of Heaven is near. It is so near we can taste it, we can speak it, we can hear it, we can feel it. So, we must pursue it. We must trust its presence. We must not dismiss it. We must not ignore it. We dare not “other” it. We dare not “unmatter” it.

Bishop Wright asks, in defiance of the human tendency to “unmatter” people, didn’t Jesus all over Galilee, at the cross and after his resurrection “matter” people? Isn’t that why his words and examples continue to soften our hearts and save us from the status quo?

He continues that sin is the conscious and unconscious “unmattering” of God, of one another and of our planet.

And Jesus is here in our ears, saying, *“The Kingdom of Heaven is near.”*

We are caught up in it, in these inevitable, yet tangible, mysteries divine and real. We are infinitesimally small. We are mere light, salt, yeast...unwanted seeds.

At best, we may feel preposterously ineffectual in the face of the tremendous perils, injustices, distractions, frustrations, voids and losses that characterize our lives. We are, we would believe, far too small to make any kind of difference in the face of injustices so big. We are even smaller in the eyes of those who see us as “others”...who clearly or covertly, who visibly or implicitly “unmatter” our existence.

And, also painfully, when we look really closely at our own hearts, we likely will find somehow and in some ways we “other” and “unmatter” beloved creations of God, as well. We must not be afraid, though, of looking into our own hearts for it is there that the Word of God lives, waiting for us to speak.

Moses told his people, “The Word is very close to you. It is already in your mouth and in your heart, waiting for you to do it.”

He continues to his people, “The commandment I’m giving you right now is definitely not too difficult for you, is not unreachable. It isn’t up in Heaven somewhere so that you have to ask who will go up to Heaven and get it so that we can hear it and do it? Nor is it across the ocean somewhere,” he continues, “so that you have to ask who will cross the ocean for us and get it for us so we can hear it and do it.”

“Not at all!” he exclaims. “The word is very close to you. It already is in your mouth and in your heart...waiting for you to do it.”

So, we must never be afraid of looking into our own hearts, for it is there that the Word of God is waiting for us to speak and to do. And we must not minimize what God can do with one changed heart, as small as it is...with one heart that merely wants, that desires to be changed, one heart that yearns to be held and to be healed.

Oh, what God can do with one heart.

The Kingdom of Heaven, we might hear Jesus say today, is like one changed heart. That defying rational explanation transforms the entire community such that generations that follow have room to learn and dwell and be with one another peacefully, living and moving and having their being together.

The Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus might say, is like one person looking at another person and choosing to see, recognizing wholeness, rather than otherness...divine unbounded love, rather than “unmattered” existence.

Listen and look, the Kingdom of God is near.