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I. Seeds and Spice and Everything Nice!

A. For the past two weeks we have been camped out in chapter 13 of Book of Matthew.

B. Chapter 13 is a series of parables that Jesus tells to describe what the Kingdom of God is like, how we grow and become fruitful, and what we can expect from it.

C. The first week Jesus described four types of soils: hard pack, rocky shallow, rich soil filled with weeds, and cultivated rich soil in which seed grows to produce a harvest.

1. The conclusion that we formed was that our lives are most productive when the condition of our heart is like the cultivated soil, free from weeds, distractions, the worries and cares of the world, not shallow or hardened.

D. Last week we looked at a story where Jesus describes how it is best to let wheat and weeds grow alongside each other and not to worry about pulling the weeds.

1. Weeds may be hypocrites, people who have wrong doctrine, differing beliefs, even people who seem to threaten the Kingdom.
2. Our conclusion last week was to let Jesus deal with the weeds at harvest time, or judgment day, and for the church, believers, to focus on growing healthy and wheat instead of making so much noise about the weeds.

E. In the middle of the story Jesus told two other stories.

F. The stories provide a bit of time for the disciples to ponder the story of the wheat and weeds before Jesus explains it.

G. There is a connection. There is continuity in the line of Jesus' thinking.

II. (Mat 13:31-33 NRSV) He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; {32} 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." {33} 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."

III. The Kingdom of God Grows like a _____!

A. Jesus has a unique connection with seeds. It is a great symbol for the Kingdom of God.

B. He seems a bit obsessed with mustard seeds. *(Mat 17:20 NRSV) He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."*

C. I think this is a great encouragement when it comes to faith.

D. Jesus wants us to know that faith is something that grows.

E. It doesn't have to be full grown before we can start to exercise our faith.

F. Quite frankly, I have seen God work on more occasions when a person comes to God and says my faith is fairly small, it is weak, it is weary. It is often in those times when God shows up.

G. In contrast, people come with big, bad, bold faith; and when doesn't answer their prayers or move their mountains on their schedule, then they have big, bad, bold doubt.

H. This metaphor is actually sort of a side note to the story about wheat and weeds.

I. In the final analysis, Jesus proclaims that it is better to grow healthy wheat than it is to worry about the weeds.

J. Now He describes even more of the strategy for healthy kingdom growth.

K. Mustard seed is not actually the smallest seed, but it is one of the tiniest. Good story tellers always use their imagination to make their point.

L. It doesn't grow into a tree, it grows to be tree-like, a very *large shrub* or *bush*.

M. {32} *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."*

N. Any of you ever lived around *Kudzu*?

1. It is affectionately known as the "*foot-a-night vine*", "*mile-a-minute vine*", and "*the vine that ate the South*"
 - a. It was introduced from Japan into the United States in 1876 and has been spreading at the rate of 150,000 acres a year.

O. *Shane Claiborne, The Irresistible Revolution*, writes: it can blanket mountains, smother trees, and crack concrete buildings.

1. He goes on to write: Jews valued order and had very strict rules about how to keep a tidy garden, and one of the secrets was to keep out mustard. It was notorious for invading the well-trimmed veggies and other plants and for quickly taking over the entire garden. Then they'd be left with only mustard! Jewish law even forbade planting mustard in the garden. When those first-century peasants heard Jesus' images, they would have giggled, or maybe they would have told him to hush before he got killed. Here he is using this infamous plant to describe God's kingdom subtly taking over the world.

P. Here is what is interesting. In many senses of the word, the mustard shrub grows like a weed!

Q. *The Kingdom of God Grows like a Weed!*

R. Jesus is telling His followers that we need to grow like weeds!!!!

S. The mustard shrub was known for its rapid growth. If it got into a garden, it had the capacity of overgrowing everything else.

T. Many of Jesus' followers were expecting Him to lead a violent revolution that would restore power to the Jews and the Kingdom of God would rule on the earth.

U. Jesus challenges their theory and instead says His followers should grow among the weeds and that healthy growth will usher in the Kingdom of God.

V. Sadly we have failed to follow Jesus' parable.

W. Shane concludes: The Jesus revolution is not a frontal attack on the empires of this world. It is a subtle contagion, spreading one little life, one little hospitality house, at a time.

IV. Seed must be _____ to _____ its power!

A. I love mustard. Especially hot mustard!

B. The mustard seed grows into a shrub that produces mustard seed.

C. The seed is harvested and must be ground in order for its spicy nature to be released.

D. It has to be crushed, broken before it is able to release its spicy power.

E. Jesus said (*John 12:24-26 NRSV*) *Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. {25} Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. {26} Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.*

F. *Seed must be broken to release its power!*

G. To be true followers of Jesus Christ, we must be broken, we must be humble servants.

V. The Power to Heal!

A. Mustard packs or plasters have been a natural treatment used for centuries to treat gout, bronchitis, sciatica, congestion, muscle pain and to even improve circulation. In the natural world it is kind of the equivalent of Vick's Vapor Rub and Ben Gay.

B. The Kingdom of God needs to be known for its healing power.

C. This goes beyond personal healing: physical, spiritual and emotional.

D. The Kingdom of God as Jesus intended should have a positive effect on society.

E. As it spreads, more and more people should be discovering abundant, spirit-filled life.

F. Let's compare it to kudzu again.

1. People knock kudzu, but it actually is a significant factor in preventing erosion.
2. It is being studied for many possible medicinal uses.
3. According to Wikipedia, The Harvard Medical School is studying kudzu as a possible way to treat alcoholic cravings, by turning an extracted compound from the herb into a medical drug.
4. Kudzu also contains a number of useful isoflavones, such as daidzein, an anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial agent which may be a cancer preventive. Kudzu root compounds can affect neurotransmitters (including serotonin, GABA, and glutamate.) It has shown value in treating migraine and cluster headaches. It is recommended for allergies and diarrhea.
5. Research in mice models suggests that kudzu is beneficial in women for control of some postmenopausal symptoms, such as hypertension and diabetes type II.

G. Just think if the Kingdom of God were to spread in such a fashion that everything it touched be physically, emotionally, and spiritually improved.

VI. The Kingdom of God Spices up your life!

A. Jesus turns from talking mustard spice, to talking about a spicy life!

B. {33} *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."*

C. Leaven or yeast, leavened and unleavened bread, are terms that are used quite often in the Bible.

D. Leaven is the agent that allows bread to rise and become fluffy.

1. Generally, if you add leaven to the dough it is going to have to sit overnight and be given time for it to let the dough rise.
2. Unleavened bread skips that process entirely, and the dough can be cooked immediately, but it will be flat.
3. Simple comparison: a leavened bread is a loaf of sandwich bread. Unleavened bread, think Pita.

E. When Moses prepared to lead the Hebrew children out of Egypt to the promised land, God instructed Moses to have the people bake their bread without leaven.

F. This is partly because they needed to be able to leave without a lot of notice. They couldn't wait for the bread to rise.

G. Also, unleavened bread has a tendency to last longer. It is less susceptible to mold.

H. I actually take a package of pita bread or tortillas with me when I hike on the Appalachian Trail.

I. Leavened, or sandwich, bread doesn't pack well and it gets stale and moldy very quickly.

J. Unleavened bread starts out stale and remains that way.

K. As the Jews began to commemorate their exodus from Egypt, (*Deu 16:3 NRSV*) *You must not eat with it anything leavened. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it--the bread of affliction--because you came out of the land of Egypt in great haste, so that all the days of your life you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt.*

L. Unleavened bread is even referred to as the ‘bread of affliction.’ As they ate unleavened bread, it reminded them of the haste in which Israel fled Egypt. It also reminded them of their time in the wilderness and that leavened bread was a luxury they couldn’t have.

M. Jesus at times referred to yeast in a negative way. (*Mat 16:6 NRSV*) *Jesus said to them, "Watch out, and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."*

N. Leavening with yeast is a process based on fermentation that biologically changes the chemistry of the dough or batter as the yeast works.

O. Jesus warned that Pharisees were having a negative effect, by introducing religious ritual and thus were confusing people about simple faith in God.

P. It is funny that, for two thousand years, there has even been a split in the church about whether leavened or unleavened bread should be used to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

Q. Denominations have made this a major point of contention.

R. At CrossRoad, most of the time we use pita bread, unleavened, when we serve it as you are seated in the pews. The reason is not theological or spiritual. It is all practical.

1. For the most part it is the most economical.
2. It is the easiest for our preparers to cut into pieces.
3. When we have you come forward and serve by intinction, giving you a piece of bread and having you dip it in the grape juice, we have just found it easier to hold the pita bread and break off a piece and place it in your hand.

S. My mom use to make a particular cake that was sort of her specialty.

1. I remember one time she made them. They looked perfect, but they tasted horrible.
2. She realized that she had mistakenly used baking soda not powder.
3. Though both are a bit of a leavening agent baking powder is much preferred in cakes.

T. Again, Jesus is saying, the kingdom of God is a leavening agent, it is the yeast that helps people rise to be who God wants them to be.

U. The Kingdom of God is meant to improve the quality of lives.

V. It has the power to transform ordinary dough from something flat and a bit tasteless, to something full and rich.

VII. Followers of Jesus are Mustard Seed and Yeast!

A. Jesus is inferring that the Kingdom of God has the capacity to grow and overrun the world if we are willing to follow Him!

B. From something small comes the ability to change the world!

- a. Each of us should be like a mustard bush. Growing our faith wildly.

C. The Church should be a seed and yeast distributor. Sending people to schools, work places, neighborhoods, and apartment complexes to grow where they are planted and transform their environments, their culture, their friends by the power of the Risen Christ working within us!

VIII. Invitation