

Small Beginnings and the Holy Mystery (Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52)

Sermon on the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (July 26, 2026)

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One of the remarkable things about Jesus is the way he teaches. He rarely gives long explanations or complicated definitions. Instead, he tells stories—simple stories taken from everyday life. Yet these stories continue to challenge us because they reveal deep truths about God's kingdom. In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us a series of short parables. At first glance, they seem unrelated: a mustard seed, yeast mixed into flour, a hidden treasure, a pearl of great value, and a fishing net. But they all point to one important truth: **God's kingdom often begins in small, hidden, and unexpected ways.**

First, he tells us the Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed. Now, when we think of a grand kingdom, we think of a towering cedar of Lebanon, a massive fortress, or at least a decently sized oak tree. Jesus chooses a mustard seed. If you have ever dropped a mustard seed on a shag carpet, you know it is not majestic. It is an invisible annoyance. It is microscopic. If you stepped on it, you wouldn't say, "Behold, the glory of God!" You would just look for a vacuum. Yet, Jesus insists that the divine moves through these tiny, almost accidental entry points. God loves small beginnings.

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard spent a lot of time thinking about how God works in the hidden, messy interior of human life. Kierkegaard famously pointed out that faith is not a grand, logical corporate system that you can map out on a whiteboard. Instead, it is a "leap of faith" into the seemingly absurd and the completely unseen. When Jesus talks about the Kingdom, he describes this exact Kierkegaardian paradox with a touch of irony: A tiny seed becomes a bush big enough for birds to nest in—which, let's face it, sounds less like a

glorious empire and more like an overgrown backyard that your homeowners' association would fine you for. A pinch of leaven transforms three measures of flour—which is enough dough to feed over a hundred people! Imagine trying to bake a casual dinner and accidentally triggering a bread apocalypse in your kitchen. A buried treasure requires selling every single thing you own on a wild gamble. Kierkegaard noted that spiritual truth begins in the quiet, inward, awkward choices of the individual. The Kingdom of Heaven does not announce itself with a stadium flyover or a viral marketing campaign. It sneaks into the world through the smallest, most unassuming cracks in our lives.

The Everyday Mystery: The Invisible Leaven.

We see this in our daily experiences. Think about baking bread. You mix flour, water, and a tiny, gray, highly unappealing packet of powder called yeast. If you sit and stare at the bowl, absolutely nothing happens. You look like a crazy person staring at flour. You might even assume you ruined the recipe and start looking up takeout menus. But you walk away, go to sleep, and wake up to a dough that has aggressively doubled in size. Our lives with God operate on this exact frequency of invisible growth. We look at our small habits, our fleeting prayers, or our clumsy attempts at kindness, and we think, “This isn’t changing the world. I’m barely keeping it together.” We feel like spiritual failures because our inner growth doesn’t come with a dramatic soundtrack.

But the theologian Paul Tillich spoke of God as the "Ground of Being." God is not a cosmic CEO directing traffic from a penthouse suite; God is the silent, underground depth animating our reality. The mystery of the Kingdom is that God is already at work in your intensely ordinary, routine moments—the exhausted conversation with a toddler, the choice to forgive a coworker who stole your lunch from the communal fridge, the decision to simply show up when you'd rather stay in bed. The Radical Value of the Hidden Jesus then transitions from

seeds and yeast to hidden treasures, expensive pearls, and a massive net. Think about the merchant searching for the pearl of great value. He finds it and sells everything he has to buy it. From a modern financial perspective, this is a spectacularly terrible business model. If you went to a financial advisor and said, "I liquidated my 401(k), sold my house, and traded my car for this one shiny marble," they would have you staged for an intervention. But Jesus is playing with poetic hyperbole. He is telling us that when we finally catch a glimpse of what God is doing—no matter how small or hidden it is—it completely breaks our old value system. What looked like worthless dirt to the rest of the world suddenly becomes the only plot of land worth owning. The Kingdom redefines what matters. It tells us that the small, foolish-looking beginning is actually the ultimate prize.

The Final Sorting: Embracing the Questions

The passage ends with a dragnet thrown into the sea, catching every kind of fish. The fishermen sit on the beach and sort the good from the bad. This is where the sermon gets uncomfortable, and where we wish Jesus had stopped talking while he was ahead with the baking analogies. We love the cozy seed; we hate the sorting net. We want clear, neat answers: Am I a good fish or a bad fish? What is the exact boundary? But Jesus doesn't give us a checklist or a five-step program. He leaves us standing on the beach, staring at the mystery of the ocean. He tells us that the scribe of the Kingdom is like a master of a house who brings out of his treasure "what is new and what is old." This means our faith cannot be a static, dusty antique. It honors the ancient traditions while remaining open to the surprising, evolving, and often disruptive ways God moves today. We are called to live with the heavy questions, to search for meaning in the dark, and to trust an invisible process we cannot control.

Conclusion: So what do these parables mean for us today?

First, never underestimate small beginnings. Second, trust God's hidden work. Third, value God's kingdom above everything else. Trust the Seed, my dear friends, and do not despise your small, messy beginnings. If your faith feels as microscopic as a mustard seed today, congratulations—you are exactly who Jesus was talking about. If your impact feels as invisible as a pinch of yeast buried in a mountain of dough, take heart. God is the undisputed master of the microscopic. Trust the hidden growth. Keep hunting for the pearl in the dirt. The Kingdom is here; it is quiet, it is small, and it is beautifully, mysteriously changing everything. Amen.