

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

³¹ He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”

³³ He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

³⁴ Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. ³⁵ So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.” **This is the Gospel of our Lord.**

Dear Fellow Disciples of Christ,

Here we have the beautiful picture of God’s kingdom. When you hear the phrase, “The kingdom of heaven,” you might think it is all about heaven but it’s more than that – the kingdom of heaven is a reference to all believers in heaven and on earth.

As we talk about seeds and plants, Jesus is trying to make the connection between Christ – who is the tiny seed – and the kingdom that results from his work of redemption.

So how does that mustard seed picture Christ? He came into this world in a most humble way as he was born in the manger in Bethlehem to a poor man and woman. It would seem an unnoticed and somewhat insignificant birth and yet it wasn’t completely unnoticed – the angels rejoiced and the shepherds went to see. But like the mustard seed – easily lost.

We don’t know much about his life as a child, growing up in Nazareth and there are many that would call his ministry a failure. He had disciples but they were not great and learned men. His followers were fishermen, tax collectors and what we would call the “common” people of the time. The Jews rejected Jesus and were sure his ministry was a failure – especially as he hung on a cross – suffering and then dying.

But with Christ’s suffering and dying the illustration of a seed continues. We now know that Christ’s suffering paid for our sins. And just as a seed dies so that it can germinate and grow into something bigger, so Christ’s death was necessary so that he could rise and assure us our salvation is complete. His resurrection was like that new plant springing forth from the ground as it pointed to the start of the New Testament Church.

Luke recorded that after the resurrection the church consisted of about 120 believers. (Acts 1:15) but on that 1st Pentecost another 3000 were added to their number. The church grew quickly as the people went out from Judea into the surrounding country and countries. There was persecution of the early Christians but that helped the church to grow all that much faster.

Just as Jesus described this little mustard seed growing into a huge plant in which the birds find shelter and build nests, so the church has grown from 120 to 3000 and to millions, even billions that have heard the Word and have been brought to faith. There isn't a corner of the world that hasn't heard the gospel message.

That takes us to our 2nd parable about the yeast working through the whole dough. As we share the gospel, we can't always see it work but it is effective and it is working. Just as you mix yeast into the dough and have to wait for it to do its work, so when you share the Gospel message, be patient and let the Spirit work through the Word – it sometimes takes a while – maybe even years but the end result is great and we can see the effect in the lives of those who have come to faith.

Reminds me of young boy (about 5 years old) that I had the opportunity to baptize during my vicar year in Texas. This young man and his 6 month old brother were both brought to be baptized at the same time. I baptized the 5 year old first and as I was baptizing his brother, he piped up, "I don't feel baptized." We can't always see or feel the Holy Spirit working but that doesn't mean he isn't there all the same. The gospel is effective because the Holy Spirit works through the Gospel.

This portion of scripture reminds us of God's great love in sending his son, the seed of the woman, to be our Savior. This portion of scripture reminds us of how the gospel has worked and continues to work in the hearts of God's people – in your hearts – like the yeast working through a lump of dough. This portion of scripture reminds us of how the church continues to grow.

As we think about this picture of seeds and plants I probably have mentioned how my dad was quite a gardener. He always had a big garden and it did quite well but he also liked to plant roses and they didn't do so well. He was lucky to get one or two flowers and it seemed that his rose bushes never made it through the winter.

Then one year things changed. When we visited Dad his roses were doing well and they even made it through the next winter and bloomed again the next year and they looked great. We had to ask, “What was your secret.” My dad smiled and said, “I have discovered Miracle Grow.”

When we think about our spiritual life, the Miracle Grow in our spiritual life is the gospel – the good news about Jesus. This “Miracle Grow,” this nourishment to keep us spiritually strong comes through the living waters of God’s Word. That living water that Jeremiah described in the Old Testament lesson.

And yet there are times when we wilt and our leaves turn brown – times when we aren’t being nourished or take a path away from God. Times when we stay away from the nourishing water of God’s Word that we all need on a regular basis. If we stay on that path we will wither and die but God cares for us and comes to us through his Word to refresh us.

Not every day of our lives will be perfect – matter of fact many of them are just the opposite but with Jesus feeding our faith, he can bring us nourishment and refresh us through his word. You might say that he is the “Son shine” that brings us peace, comfort and strength. So that we can be part of that giant mustard tree – the kingdom of believers.

And this “Good News” of Jesus is something to share. Keeping the plant theme in mind, we want to be like that strawberry plant sending out shoots and continuing to grow and spread. As we talk about our Savior, the cross, forgiveness and salvation the Holy Spirit will work to bring the living water to more and more. May God give keep you strong and healthy through the refreshing waters of his Word and may he give you plenty of opportunities to help share his message. Amen.