



Mother's Day, May 9, 2010  
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## THY KINGDOM COME *OUT OF CONTROL* *Matthew 13: 31-35*

We recently had some really nice fir French doors installed going out to our deck. But Cyndi decided that she didn't like the trim we had chosen. So she said, "Here's my Mother's Day gift; change this trim." I thought, "Sweet... a little molding, some paint, half day of work. No problem." Of course it required the purchase of a new air compressor for my nail gun which cost \$240. You've got to use proper equipment, right men? So...yes, I **did** have a nice Mother's Day, thank you very much.

When we pulled off the trim, we decided we wanted to insulate all of the empty spaces between the door casing and the wall so I bought some of this stuff. I've used this before but I had forgotten that when the instructions say, "Fill the void only 50%" ...they really mean it! I sprayed the stuff in, started working on the other side of the door, and looked over to discover that I had Jabba the Hut growing out of my wall.

Isn't that what Jesus is saying about the Kingdom of Heaven in these two mini-parables? **Something little becomes something big...out of control big.** He uses two images to illustrate this: **mustard seed and yeast.** See this? [*holding up a mustard seed*] Of course you don't. It takes 21,000 mustard seeds to make an ounce. And yeast? I know...yeast isn't exactly a seed...but work with me here. A seed of yeast is even smaller than the mustard seed.

The point of both stories is the same: the tiniest, unassuming little agent produces out-of-control-growth. Just like this. [*Show foam overflowing from box*] But there is more to the analogy. Not only are these "seeds" **tiny**, they are also **"naughty."** Mustard is a weed. Kind of like our blackberries. If you had to pull out a 12 foot mustard bush, you'd know how "weedy" it really was. **And what about yeast?** Is it naughty? Throughout the New Testament, every time yeast is mentioned, it represents evil...corruption. Jesus warns against the **"yeast of the Pharisees"** (Mark 8:15.) Paul tells the Corinthians, **"Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast..."** I Corinthians 5: 7

You've heard the expression, "One bad apple spoils the whole bunch." Same idea. Just a little bit of yeast can have a corrupting effect...a polluting effect on the whole lump of dough. It's the reason we warn our kids not to hang out with troublemakers. It's the reason that we avoid eating that first potato chip...or smoking that first joint. Just a little taste—just a little influence—can end up having an overwhelmingly corrupting effect.

Every place the New Testament talks about yeast, it is evil. Every place, that is, except for this verse. This is the **only** time that yeast is presented positively. Here, yeast represents **holy corruption.** To corrupt something means to taint it. "Holy corruption"...well, you get the idea. We in God's Kingdom get **tainted with holiness.**

And what is the result of this tiny, holy corruption? **Out-of-control growth.** A tiny little seed produces a huge, bushy tree. And the yeast leavens 30 pounds of flour! That's enough to feed 400 people.

Let's put all of this together: the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, like yeast: it is tiny, naughty, subversive ...and out-of-control. **I guarantee this:** when Jesus' first said these words, folks would have been surprised. It would be like me saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a blackberry patch." We don't normally brag about blackberries; we complain about them. We like the fruit...but mostly, they are a pain! We prefer to plant blueberries or raspberries—they are so much more civilized. So much more controllable! Why would you choose mustard or yeast as a good example of the kingdom of heaven?

Doesn't this describe the origins of the Christian faith? Christianity was not an impressive, sweeping, carefully crafted philosophy like Stoicism. Those guys like Plato and Socrates... now **they** were philosophers. Jesus was a bumpkin; an

itinerant preacher from Podunk Nazareth. And he surrounded himself with as “seedy” a bunch of followers as you could imagine. Not the intellectual cream of the crop like those who followed Aristotle. No—fishermen and farmers and tax collectors and whores. There’s nothing impressive or large or elegant about the origins of Christianity. Yet look what came of it. **That tiny, scroungy little seed grew into a tree that has given shelter and shade to the entire world. Its leaven has spread and sprawled its way all across the globe, bringing holy corruption to every culture it has ever touched.**

Jesus, who was himself unimpressive and uncredentialed by the world’s standards, said, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like this. When I plant my seed in this world, watch out! If you are standing anywhere near by, it’s going to get real bushy real fast! If you are part of my doughy, lumpy people...you are going to get contaminated! Holy contaminated. This isn’t so much something you do...it is something you get caught up in. It is God who is doing the planting and if you are willing to be swept up in it, you will be amazed by its out-of-controllability.”

This parable is really pretty encouraging after the last two parables. In the parable of the Sower, we discovered that three out of four soils cannot produce a crop. And in the next parable we discovered an enemy out there, sowing weeds right in the **middle** of the crop. But in this parable, we are encouraged. Even though there is a lot of bad soil—even though we have an enemy that is trying to pollute the crop—if you let God sow the seed of the kingdom in you... stand back! Fasten your seatbelt! Here we go.

I used to take my youth group down to Magic Mountain which is famous for its roller coasters. One of the scariest was Viper. If you got on Viper, you knew you were predestined to take a terrifying, upside down, dropping, whipping-around-corners kind of ride. The only way off that coaster would have been to jump out—and how crazy would that be? If you are part of the Dough Bunch...the Lumpy People—that’s us, right...the Lumpy People?—brace yourself for an out-of-control experience.

Like signing up to build houses in Mexico. You may not even be sure how you ended up as part of this lump! Maybe your buddy talked you into it. Maybe your wife talked you into it. Maybe you just wanted some sunshine. But next Thursday, when you stick yourself into that lump with 70 other men, you might find things getting out of control in your life. And in a different way than you might feel out of control right now. In a good, and scary...and exhilarating and transforming way. Tiny seeds... out-of-control results.

Those “houses” that we are going to build next weekend? They are more like tool sheds: 11 x 22 feet in size, one door, and two windows. Really, as “houses” go, they are almost embarrassing. Tiny, unimpressive. So why do it? Why waste our time? What possible difference can it make? Because, God is using us to cast mustard seeds. We are hiding yeast. Because we believe that when we are willing to be used by Jesus to do small, insignificant things, it produces results that are out-of-control!

What does one 230 square foot shack do to make a difference in this world? Not much. But what about 100? Or 1000? How about 10,000? That’s the number of homes that Amor Ministries has built. And Mexico will be a little different. Some poor people will discover that they actually matter...to some rich gringos and, more importantly, to God. Maybe their future will have a different kind of soil; a soil a little bit more out of the control of the ruling class or of the rising gangster class. We are sowing seeds.

But understand this: this is not mostly about the seeds that we sew in Jesus’ name. It’s more about the tiny, invasive, subversive seed of the gospel that God plants in us. Yeast that begins to grow and take over and suddenly... **we are out of control; because we have relinquished control to someone greater than ourselves.** We like to think that we make a difference when we build houses for people. And we will! But being a part of that lump will change you, too. Forever. You’ll never see Mexico’s poor people living in paper shacks in the same way again. You may never look at your own home, your car, your pantry, your family, your life and time and money the same way again. You may never see poor people--or even rich people in Gig Harbor the same way, either.

Happy Mother's Day, ladies. I'm going to bring back 70 men whose lives are out of control. Hoorah, right? Just what you need! But I'm not kidding; they will be different. It is Mexico-Build men who are among those now leading mission GO teams in Guatemala, Swaziland, Romania, Cambodia. We didn't plan it that way. It just happened. The mustard seed of Mexico began to grow in the hearts of those men... their eyes got bigger and their hearts got bigger and the world got smaller, and they realized that God was calling them to something that was... a little bit out of control.

Yesterday we celebrated Karina Robertson's memorial service. Karina was 19 when cancer took her. She hardly had time in this life to have made much of a difference. In a sense, she was a little mustard seed. Small. Kind of insignificant. Or so it seemed. When Karina was in sixth grade—**sixth grade**, mind you—she had the idea of using their new family beach home to host a summer Bible camp. She would invite friends from throughout her neighborhood. She would organize a 5 day camp with activities and drama and music and she would teach simple, fun, life-changing lessons about Jesus and the cross and his resurrection and having a personal relationship with him.

Sixth grader! Tiny seed. Do you know how many children came to Karina's first Summer Splash? 35. Some of them came to know Jesus that summer. Some of them from unbelieving families. And she continued to do that camp every summer except for one: the summer she was first diagnosed with cancer. Her biggest regret that summer was that her chemo would prevent her from doing Summer Splash.

What kind of impact did that little seed have? Well, last week, one of the young men who started in her camp six years ago, professed his faith in Christ and joined this church. And, only God truly knows who else and what else was changed through the little seeds God planted through Karina Robertson.

Really, this parable is about the power of the gospel to transform lives. When we allow the seed of the gospel of Jesus—even the smallest, scroungiest little seed—to be planted in our souls, it starts to take over. It can't help it. It is the out-of-control nature of the Kingdom to overwhelm our expectations and outgrow the religious box we put it in.

Last March 24 was the 30 year anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero. Romero was a courageous voice speaking out against the injustice in his land of El Salvador. He was gunned down by a government hit squad while celebrating the mass in a small chapel in a cancer hospital where he lived. The following essay was written in Romero's honor.

*It helps now and then to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.*

***This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing this. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.***

Many people hold themselves back from following Jesus...from living like Jesus tells them to live...because the task seems so daunting. So much to change, so much that they feel guilty about, so much that is wrong with their life, so much need in the world that they don't even know where to start. Here's what the Kingdom of Heaven is like: one tiny seed. One tiny start. One little, maybe embarrassing first step. Just open your hand and see what God will put in it. It might not seem like it could make any difference. Might feel incredibly insignificant. But what is one, little, thing **that you could do**...one little seed that God could use you to plant.

What is one little phone call you need to make when you go home today? What is one “I’m sorry” that you can say that might start the process of healing? One little prayer you could offer at the dinner table tonight before diving into your meal? One person you could forgive? One verse you can read for one minute in the morning for one week? One small act of service?

You may not think there is much you can do. You may think that the little you can do won’t matter. The seed you have to plant may be tiny, flimsy, unimpressive, embarrassing even. But plant it. The yeast you may hide in the dough may not seem big enough or strong enough to make any difference in the world. But hide it! You have no idea how God might take your small offer of your life, your wealth, your gifts, your time, your forgiveness, your kindness, your mercy... and grow it into an out-of-control expression of his love and grace.

Remember how momma used to say, “Control yourself!” Well, Jesus says, “Follow me... we’re going out of control!”

## SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The first three parables about the Kingdom of Heaven all have to do with seed...and each seed represents something a little different. Review all three. What does “seed” (we are considering “yeast” to be a seed, here) represent in today’s text?
2. What are the qualities of the seed in these two mini-parables? If you knew that the literal word for “mixed” was “hid” in the second parable, (i.e., “a woman took and ‘hid’ [the yeast] into the ...flour”), does that offer any further insights?
3. Why would Jesus’ listeners have been surprised to hear him describe the Kingdom of Heaven in these terms? Especially as “yeast?”
4. What is the core truth of this parable? Is it teaching that when we do something small for the kingdom, it can become something surprisingly great? OR is it teaching that the Holy Spirit can take a small seed of faith in our lives and grow it into something surprisingly great?
5. What is one tiny, “naughty,” insignificant thing that you have held back from God but that he might use to make a huge difference? Get specific.
6. What is one tiny step that you could take this week to trust God to produce out-of-control growth for the sake of his Kingdom?