



e - Votion

Wednesday, July 23 2014

Dear Friends,

Today I am reading Matthew 13:31-33, and 44-52

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 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.

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."

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."



By all practical purposes, John Wesley was a failure in America. He served as a parish minister in Savannah, Georgia and didn't last two years before he incurred the wrath of the people and returned to England dejected. But it was here in the United States that Methodism became a separate denomination--separating from Wesley's beloved Church of England. He reluctantly blessed the separation for a pragmatic reason (Wesley was one of the great pragmatists of all time..). People were coming to know Christ through the mostly rural Methodist ministry and there weren't enough Anglican priests to serve the Lord's Supper.

America changed Methodism and Methodism returned the favor. And by 1900, the Methodist church

was the largest Protestant denomination, with about 80 million followers today. John Wesley, his brother Charles, and Methodism joined other evangelistically minded Christians in promoting a faith deeply felt and actively lived. Wesley sought to be a "true Christian" --unlike the "nominal" Christians surrounding him in England. His deepest desire was to help others be "true" Christians as well. And for Wesley, A true Christian was marked by two inseparable qualities: holiness and happiness.

All this began in a very small way in England--a few people formed a "Holy Club" to try to systematically serve God in every hour of the day. They prayed, examined their spiritual lives, studied the Bible, and met together regularly. They took food to poor families, visited lonely people in prison, and taught orphans how to read. They celebrated Communion together and they fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays until 3 pm. A small beginning blossomed into a very large tree.

Jesus promised his followers it could be like that in the kingdom of God: Small beginnings, with some leaven of faith and persons willing to sacrifice and pay a price, produces amazing results.

The gospel writer Matthew arranged Jesus' teachings by similar subjects. And in the 13th chapter, Jesus talks about a mustard seed that is small and grows into a great tree. He talked about what he most likely saw his mother do--a lump of yeast in bread dough, influences all the flour. A treasure hidden in a field and a man gave all he had to get that treasure.

All of these stories are great lessons to us who count the cost, the possibilities of failure, the meager size of the project compared with the problems we encounter, and often we don't even start. Jesus said not to underestimate how a small beginning can grow into spectacular results. Those parables offer an important understanding to those of us seeking to be faithful disciples--the coming of God's kingdom causes transformation in our individual lives as dramatic as yeast in dough, and in the lives of communities such as that original Holy Club. Most often, the transformation starts with tiny, insignificant, maybe even what the world might call unimportant beginnings.

It can be overwhelming. We cannot singlehandedly eradicate malaria, but we can donate what we have to help. We cannot singlehandedly fund our church budget, or even fund our expanding children and youth ministries, but we can give what we can of our time and our talents, and our resources to help. We cannot stop hunger in our community, but we can help at our church's food pantry, and provide snack supper to children and youth, and lunch to our new service The Branch. God can do great things with what we might consider inconsequential, not big enough to make a difference.

Sometimes the little things--a note, some flowers, a phone call of support balloons into large acts of kindness which are then practiced by those who are skeptical.

Christianity brings about big changes in lives. Mean people are transformed into kind people, greedy folks become the ones who graciously share. Entire communities are changed with Christian leaven--we love people who are different in skin color, culture, ethnic heritage than our own. We shelter the homeless, the battered, the abused. We feed the hungry.

What if-- we take what little we can each do, trust the simple parables of Jesus as correct descriptions of God's kingdom, and see for ourselves how little grows into much, sometimes even unseen and unheralded.

God worked it out to provide for our forgiveness, our salvation, a little spiritual help here and there, and eternal life beyond the grave. From a very unpromising beginning in Bethlehem, a new model of ministry, a not so good relationship with the religious of the day, a disgraceful crucifixion as a common criminal, CHANGED OUR LIVES 2000 years later.

Jesus told these parables to his disciples and we are his disciples too! We must find ways to plant seeds, even if those ways are very small and seem insignificant. We must mix in and be the leaven for the whole loaves. God calls us to be workers in the kingdom. Jesus teaches us that there are treasures on earth for which we ought to sacrifice. For God's church, for our individual ministries, for our priceless families, we must be willing to pay the price when it means great sacrifice on our parts. Sharing our whole selves is much called for in God's kingdom, for which we pray "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

May we have a vision of what it means to be a True Christian. :)

PRAYER CONCERNS AND PRAISES:

- Please pray for our children's and youth ministries as we prepare for fall ministry. This Sunday will be promotion Sunday for Sunday school as well as for PTJ, Youth Ministry, and Wednesday niter. We are blessed to have a bunch of children and youth moving up to the next grade in school and to the next level of ministry. Please pray for Brandy and Lisa, with thanksgiving for their respective ministries, and how you might be a part of this small piece of God's kingdom.
- Please pray for guidance and celebration, for a new Sunday School class starting August 3 for college and young career persons. A vision out of the Pathfinders Sunday School class, if you want to help, call Deborah Grant! Praise God for this emerging ministry.
- Please pray for Xavier, a youth who had foot surgery this week.
- Please pray for Lorena Hess, Sabrina Hess's grandmother.
- Please pray for Shirley Palmer, Jane Eddy, Martha Hauff, Serena Crowder's parents, Jackie and Avril Bookout

How can we covenant together to become a praying church, seeking to be at the center of God's will? PRAY.

CALENDAR:

- Thursday July 24, Youth Leadership Team, 7 pm
 - Leadership Pillar, 6:30 pm
- Saturday July 26, Food Pantry
- Sunday July 27, Bill Carter preaching 10:30 Steve Morrison preaching The Branch.
 - Also it is Promotion Sunday.
- Monday July 28-Friday July 1 Day Camp in the Community for First UMC children. (Contact Brandy Robinson for more info and to register)
- Tuesday July 29 Youth Parent meeting 7 pm
- Wednesday July 30, Cardinal Park and 1st UMC 5:30 pm Cardinal Park
- Thursday July 31, Young at Heart One Acre Cafe
- August 3-6 Camp Meeting at Sulphur Springs UMC.

"Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words." St Francis of Assisi

Blessings,

Jane Taylor
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