



e - Votion

Dear Friends,

Today I am reading Matthew 13:31-33:

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 the 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."

We are spending the month of September learning about and talking about and living in the community of faith that makes us uniquely who we are here at First UMC. And that has moments of celebration and moments of sorrow. I once had a friend who was wounded and humiliated by a fellow Christian, a worship leader in his church. And when she told me the story, she said, "I don't even know if he's a Christian. I cannot bear to watch him lead worship." Heartbreaking on all accounts.

And I find myself thinking when I have a disagreement now and then, "Have I behaved in a Christian manner?" And do I dare even think, "I wonder if she is really a Christian. Perhaps she is running on fumes and needs a fill up by the Holy Spirit" And honestly, sometimes ALL of us, "are" and "were" Christians who get caught up in position, power, and prominence. We can find ourselves focused on the cares and worries of the world and the delight in riches, as Jesus said, and the fragile, beautiful seeds of life get choked out.



The Tree Song

*I saw a tree by a riverside
One day as I walked along
Straight as an arrow and pointing to the sky
Growing tall and strong
How do you grow so tall and strong?
I said to the riverside tree
This is the song that my tree friend sang to me.*

*I've got roots growing down to the water
I've got leaves growing up to the sunshine
And the fruit that I bear is a sign of life in me
I am shade from the hot summer sun-down
I am nest for the birds of the heaven
I'm becoming what the Lord of trees has meant me to be
A strong young tree.*

*I saw a tree in the city streets
Where buildings block the sun
Green and lovely I could see
It gave joy to everyone
How do you grow in the city streets?
I said to the downtown tree
This is the song that my tree friend sang to me.*

*I've got roots growing down to the water
I've got leaves growing up to the sunshine
And the fruit that I bear is a sign of life in me
I am shade from the hot summer sun-down
I am nest for the birds of the heaven
I'm becoming what the Lord of trees has meant me to be
A strong young tree.*

-- Lyrics by Evie Tornquist

Sometimes I think about the circles of discipleship around Jesus-- he had the innermost circle he chose for purity of heart, passion, and strength of character: Peter, James, and John. Then he had the 12, the 72, the 500, the 5000 plus women and children--those he multiplied loaves and fishes for and the crowds who followed him. All followed, some closer than others, and with a variety of intensity and commitment. The people whose behavior is unlike Jesus's stray to an outer circle of discipleship as I do at times.

In this passage from Matthew, Jesus gives us another way of understanding Christians. The kingdom of God is the micro-world of our lives, the MACRO is like a mustard tree, though the smallest of seeds, when it grows is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, that the birds come and perch in its branches.

We are seedlings and saplings in the Kingdom before we become a mighty tree.

The Christians whose behavior puzzles me (just like I definitely puzzle others) are saplings, new, sometimes distracted in the ways of following Christ. Perhaps God will send water and sun and good soil on us all so that we can grow so astoundingly that eventually we bear no resemblance to what we were. :)

Judging others dries out our souls and stunts our spiritual growth. When we find ourselves engaging in judging, we really must redirect our thoughts back to ourselves and how we can do constructive work for the Kingdom. Jesus gives us great instructions on how to deal with our natural tendencies to judge. He invites us to look in the mirror and check to see if we are guilty of the very same thing that we are judging one another for. According to Freud, the traits we most hate in others are those we secretly see and suppress within ourselves.

So.... Jesus suggests to us that when we see bossy Christians, manipulative Christians, over-ambitious Christians, instead of gnashing our teeth, we should examine our souls, and go to God in prayer. Take the slow road to recovery. When we do, we find ourselves in new growth and change.

We pray for our enemies. For those who hurt us. Those who irritate us. We cannot ever assume anyone else's place, or lack of it, in the Kingdom. Maybe the other person is a sapling just like us. May we pray for us all to become mighty trees that the birds of the air will come and nest in our branches!

PRAISES AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

Pray for: UMW Sunday this coming Sunday, Jean Jones, Jane Eddy, Lisa Kleven, Edna Johnson, our children and youth, the ministries of the church.

CALENDAR AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Saturday September 27 Food Pantry
 - Wesley Foundation BBQ
 - Fundraiser for International Christian Fellowship in the church gym (David Gbaa)
- Sunday September 28 UMW Sunday 10:30
 - 3 pm District Conference, Wesley Memorial UMC
 - 5:30 Connections Pillar
- Tuesday September 30 6:30 SPR
- Thursday October 2 Finance Committee
- Saturday October 4 Youth Masquerade Ball at The Charles, to benefit Liberia Ebola efforts

"Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words."

St Francis of Assisi

Blessings,

Jane Taylor
First United Methodist Church
Johnson City TN