

Proper 6

Text: Mark 4:26 – 34

Theme: The kingdom of God, which sometimes Jesus also called the Kingdom of heaven. What is it like?

What is the kingdom of God like, wonder the disciples. It is like a mysterious do-gooder who comes in the night, and you wake up in the morning and surprise—there are pink flamingos planted all over your yard! Its your birthday, you love pink flamingos—now who could have done such a nice thing for you?

That's what the kingdom of God is like. Except, It's not pink flamingos—it is little tiny seeds that will grow into wheat, first the sprout, then the stalk, and you get to harvest it and make it in to bread, even though you didn't plant it—God did.

So, what is the kingdom of God? The kingdom of heaven is a mysterious surprise—and it nourishes us.

And then there's this: the kingdom of heaven **starts out small**,
as small as a tiny little mustard seed, but it can grow very big.

And, as awkward as this image is for a church that loves its beautiful music and dignified worship, the reality is, says Jesus, actually kind of like crab grass, or poison ivy. It's more like a scrub brush than it is like a cathedral.

It shows up all over the place. Places you don't expect it to, because you're not the one who planted it. Places like soup kitchens, or the bedside of the dying, or the birth of child.

Like birds drop seeds that become mustard bushes, or poison ivy or crab grass. the kingdom can happen all over the place. Anywhere a seed has dropped, the kingdom can grow—and it gets dropped in some pretty odd places.

The kingdom of God, or, sometimes Jesus called it the kingdom of heaven.

That place where God dwells. Which, Jesus taught, isn't just "up there," but down here too.

Early Christians taught the Kingdom of heaven was a different dimension of reality. English priest, bishop and teacher NT Wright gives a helpful model illustration. Imagine 2 intersecting circles, kind of like a Ven diagram. In one circle, humans are in charge. In the other, God is in charge. In one dimension of reality, humans are in charge, and in the other, God is in charge. And, like a Ven diagram, they overlap a little.

Jesus taught that the kingdom doesn't just happen in God's out there, but it can also happen within us, and between us. We don't have to have completely crossed over to heaven, that is have died, to get little tastes of God and the reality of God's kingdom.

But that begs the question, doesn't it? Just how do we know, how do we learn to see the kingdom, to experience it? You know how the hearing of dogs is different than our human hearing? They can hear very high pitches that aren't detectable to the human ear?

Part of being human is to have the capacity to detect the kingdom:

St Augustine wrote: Our hearts were made for you, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Some spiritual teachers refer to humans as being made with a God shaped hole, a place within that only God can fill. Usually, our spiritual journeys, or the next piece of our spiritual journey, because we will all take multiple spiritual journeys over a life time--often spiritual journeys begin prompted by that longing.

So, I want to finish by giving you another image to chew on. (It is any image that Jesus could not have used because in his days, electricity hadn't yet been discovered.)

Have you ever been in a large city and looked up, and you could only see a couple of stars, or maybe only the moon? Think about what happens when you look up from your own backyard. Think about how the night sky looks if you view it from

a pasture in the country? Have you ever seen how the night sky looks in the middle of a desert?

The stars were there all along—we just weren't in the right place to see them. The kingdom of God can be like that. There all along, but sometimes we just aren't in the right place to see it.

There is a reason that we call spiritual life a journey—to experience the gift of the kingdom that God has scattered to surprise, and delight, and feed us—that God has scattered all over the place, we have keep moving.

If we want to see more of the starry sky, we need to leave behind the light pollution of the city, and head out to a place where we can better see the stars.

If we want to see the kingdom, need to leave behind the fog of our daily life, and take a step towards a place where we can encounter pieces of the kingdom.

The spiritual disciplines that are mentioned in our baptismal covenant help us take those steps. And it is a lifetime of wrestling with the ideas in the covenant, learning to practice them, that help us grow, and to take the next steps of the journey.

Now, many of us have busy lives, so it can be hard to find extra time to give to God. But that's OK.

We start where we are able to start: first the sprout, then the head, then the full head of grain. From seeds scattered all over our lives, God can grow something. Starting small is good enough. And definitely better than never stepping on the journey at all. There's a kingdom to discover!

What's most important, in spiritual lives, is not the size of the seed. What's most important is that it can grow if we let God nurture it. First the sprout, then the stalk, then the full head of grain. What's most important, is to take the journey.

What's most important is to, from the middle of the light pollution of the city, to look up, see a star and decide that you'd like to see more. And then going out and investing in a ticket.

Spend whatever you have to spend—the amount of time, or energy that we give to prayer, or worship, or study varies depending on what is going on in our lives. God will do something with whatever we can offer at the moment, as long as it is offered from the heart.

Just like the starry sky waits for us to discover it, Jesus teaches that the kingdom is waiting for us to discover. Seeds of the kingdom are scattered without our knowing, landing in places beyond our imagining.

To see the starry night sky, all we need to do spend a little pocket change for a ticket and get on the train. Spend more, and you might even just make it to the desert, where the vast expanse of sky, and the dry thin air make for a view that is simply breathtaking. To encounter the kingdom, all we need to do is spend a little time and take the next step of the journey.

The further we go, the more of the kingdom we will see.
The view can be simply breathtaking.

AMEN.