

FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY: "One Mustard Seed at a Time." – October 16, 2016

By Wayne J. Schneider – Cum Santo Spiritu

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St. Matthew 13; 31 & 33

I have found it rather odd that it often takes a traumatic experience, or just the accumulation of age, for us to begin a rigorous examination of our lives. Sitting in the home or standing by the hospital bed of parishioners, I have listened to women and men who ask questions like, "*Has anything I have done for Jesus been important?*" I recall one woman telling me, "*All that I have done for God and the church has been little, unimportant stuff.*"

It is easy to throw ourselves under the spiritual bus, so to speak, when we compare our holy work with those of John Wesley, Martin Luther, or Paul Tillich. If we remember Jesus' dialog with John the Baptizer following the Sermon on the Mount, we discover some help.

John asks Jesus if he is the Messiah, and Jesus says this to the messengers: "*Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.*"

So, when we feel as if we are not accomplishing much for God, we remember that we have already done the principal work: we have given our life to God. And each day we plant the tiny seeds of compassion and mercy, and they grow daily. We cannot always see their growth. This Kingdom of God needs to be planted in us and allowed time to grow within us. It requires space to be worked in and through. And, though it may appear to be tiny, may seem to be anything but what we expected, it is here, and it will change the world.

It is the media, secular or sacred, that highlights the 'big events.'

Those who lived in Israel didn't get it. They were looking for the cataclysmic victory that would free them from historical repression: the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, and finally the Romans.

The Israelis believed their only hope for freedom, was an uprising that would bring about the rule of God. But Jesus says a clear "No!" "No" to the crowds, "No" to the religious leaders, and "No" to the Zealots who wanted to arm themselves against the Romans.

Jesus was a visionary, but he was also a poet. Following the parable of the mustard seed, he compared the Kingdom of Heaven to yeast that a woman takes and mixes into bread dough. Both parables describe the Kingdom of God arriving slowly, covertly, hardly noticeable. Jesus didn't attempt a big splash, didn't act confrontationally; he wanted to make a lasting difference.

The Zealots wanted to affect change by force, while Jesus said the change would come by mercy and compassion. The Religious leaders of Israel believed the Kingdom of God would come by the enforcement of God's Law. Instead, Jesus gives us the Beatitudes. The Sadducees thought that if they kept the Temple and its sacred rituals pure, the Kingdom would come. Jesus, however, stated that outward appearance needed to be replaced with unconditional love.

Some of Jesus disciples listened. Some argued. Some considered forsaking Jesus altogether. Many in the crowds who followed Jesus were confused about what to believe, but they all needed Jesus' blessings.

In a rare interview, a reporter asked St. Theresa of Calcutta, what she was going to say when she arrived in Heaven. Without blinking, she said "*I'm going to say 'You've got a lot of explaining to do'.*"

Jesus is the 'gentle' Jesus who rarely became angry. He taught in puzzling parables, then allowed the crowds to brood over the meaning. These were common folk, who yearned for direction and hope, the reason they listened.

Jesus' parables were spoken gently, but they were stimulating. Some were spoken plainly others were more challenging. Either way, the Kingdom of God was slowly working its way into the world.

To the questions, "*When will it all take place? And, How will we recognize it when it arrives?*" Jesus' answer is frustrating: "*No one knows the time or place.*" He understood the requirement, though: "*Love one another as God loves you.*" And, like Winston Churchill, he said, "*Never give up!* Perhaps not in these words, but this is why the religious and civil authorities killed him, because he would not, could not give up.

The parables of Jesus reach right into our hearts. They inquire of us penetrating questions like, '***Where do we see ourselves in the parable? Have you discovered the beauty, value, and the truth of the Kingdom of God in the parable?***' Please allow me to urge you to choose God's Kingdom. When you hear the voice of God, may you be like Samuel who answered immediately. When you sense the Holy Spirit's guidance, act upon it.

Since the Kingdom of God is God reigning in our lives, being a member is to give God sovereignty in our lives. This also what Jesus also asks. It is not living in revolt but obedience.

The Kingdom of God might look small, like a mustard seed or a pinch of yeast, but it is powerful, and it is here. Physical things are temporary, but the Kingdom is eternal.

So, the mustard seed bush is growing, the yeast is expanding in the dough, and a kazillion acts of compassion and mercy are creating the Kingdom of God. And, it is not just the famous missionaries like David Livingstone or Saints like Mother Theresa who produce the Kingdom. It is you and me and millions of sisters and brothers scattered near and far, whose miniscule acts done day after day, often known only by those who do and receive them, that honor God and build the Kingdom.

May it be so for us. Alleluia. Amen.

