

A Proper 12	<p><b>The Kingdom is Like...</b></p> <p>Matthew 13.31-33, 44-46</p> <p>by Tim Isbell</p>	Preached 1999
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Thesis: The Kingdom of God, like an individual's Christian faith, begins as something very small which grows into something very large and valuable.

### **St. Patrick's story**

*(On the Internet or elsewhere you can find several versions of the story of Saint Patrick, so if you plan to use his life story as part of a sermon I suggest you read one of these. The notes below are my "refresher.")*

About 380 AD. Patricus (Saint Patrick) ... 16 yr old Roman Brit ... parents & grandparents were very civilized Christians

Patricus was captured by Irish raiders ... dragged off as a slave to an Irish "king" ... assigned a life of shepherding ... cold & hungry most of the time.

There were no Christians in Ireland at the time.

During the solitude of shepherding Patricus began to pray to the God of his father and grandfather. Over the next 6 yrs, he went from a civilized, agnostic teenager to a holy man.

While asleep one night he sensed a voice say: "Your hungers are rewarded, you are going home." Patricus sat up startled and the voice continued: "Look, your ship is ready."

He ran away from his master that night and walked 200 miles to the coast. He was never stopped or recaptured! He saw a ship and approached sailors, who easily identified him as a runaway slave. They threatened to return him, then changed their minds and took him on board to help sail cargo to the continent.

It took 3 days to cross to the continent. The group then spent 2 weeks wandering through wasteland without finding any people or food. Apparently, they arrived in 407, right after the Germans had devastated the area.

The ship's captain eventually turned to Patricus and asked, "How about it, Christian? You say your God is great and powerful, so why can't you pray for us? We're starving to death and there's little chance of our ever seeing a living soul!"

Patricus responded, "From the bottom of your heart, turn trustingly to the Lord my God,

for nothing is impossible to him. And today he will send you food for your journey until you are filled, for he has abundance everywhere.”

They bowed their heads to try a moment of faith, and immediately heard hoofs of pigs coming down the road!

Several years later Patrick returns to the home of his parents. By then he’s hopelessly behind in his education. But he sees a vision of a man he knew in Ireland saying “We beg you to come walk with us once more.”

So Patricus resolves to go back to Ireland. To prepare, he attends school and is ordained, though never fully educated, and returns to Ireland where he serves God the rest of his life by carrying the Good News to Ireland.

Patricus baptizes thousands of Irish as Christians, he establishes pastors and bishops throughout the land, and the island is transformed through his teaching.

***This is the kind of true story that happens over and over again in the Christian faith. Something starts small, humble, and grows into something grand.***

## **In today’s scripture, Jesus gives 4 short stories**

He made them up. Jesus often made up illustrations, partly because these are easy to remember. They are about...

- One is about a mustard seed. Matthew probably got this illustration from Mark, who wrote his gospel earlier and includes the same parable. It’s also in Luke’s gospel.
- The second is about yeast. This one is not in Mark, but since it’s also in Luke it is probably from Q. Q is a presumed reference writing that was available in the Christian community at the time, from which Matthew and Luke borrowed some content for their gospels. But Q as a stand-alone document is not in the Bible.
- The third and fourth are about hidden treasure, and the pearl. These are not in Mark or Luke, so they are presumed original with Matthew.

### **Mustard seed: Mat 13.31f**

#### **God’s Kingdom starts small, like Patricus’ faith.**

When Patricus was dragged off to Ireland his faith was as small as a single mustard seed. But the Holy Spirit faithfully nurtured it into something giant.

*(Tell a couple of stories of someone you know and in whom someone planted the tiny seed of the gospel, and who grew into an authentic Christian. Or, you could use examples of Christian ministries that started with a small seed but grew into something substantial. When I first preached this sermon, two examples I used are listed below –*

*but it's best if you provide more personal/current examples for your listeners.)*

- 1. Little People Christian Preschool/Daycare**
- 2. Chinese ministry at New Life Nazarene Church**

**Jesus was a “small” seed, but he turns out to be the firstborn among billions of citizens of God’s Kingdom (children in God’s family).**

The beginnings of the Kingdom described in the New Testament are pretty humble, but don’t let that fool you - today it is in nearly every corner of the world.

Even today, the little church we are in may look small and insignificant, but when it fully comes into focus we see that it is one of the millions of outposts of the enormous Kingdom of God that numbers over 2 billion people. Every one of these little churches is networked together by the Spirit of Jesus.

And scripture tells us that this Kingdom will eventually overwhelm every other kingdom of the world.

### **Yeast: Matt 13.33**

God mixed Saint Patrick deep in the dough of Ireland. And God used that little bit of “yeast” to transform an entire nation.

Many social transformations flow from authentic Christian faith: the elimination of slavery, equality for women, hospitals and other facilities that care for the ill, homes to care for the aged, orphanages to care for unwanted children.

Wherever authentic Christian yeast is in the mix, God transforms lives. If lives are not being transformed, something is wrong with the yeast.

Don’t let people fool you into thinking authentic Christian faith is bad for anybody, or any culture. We humans sometimes carry a contaminated Christian religion around that causes lots of problems. But authentic Christian faith is the best thing that ever happens to any culture.

And authentic Christian faith is also the best thing that ever happens to any individual. But it takes time to transform the dough.

How about you, are you authentic Christian “yeast” that God is mixing deep into the dough of your Friends, Relatives, Associates, and Neighbors (FRANs)?

#### ***The point:***

there is something massively transforming about being part of the Kingdom of Heaven, both for the individual and for society.

## **Treasure: Matt 13.44**

*(You could also bring in the Jeremiah story of buying a field and burying his treasure ... common before the Babylonian captivity. It's in Jeremiah 32.)*

### ***Story of my grandfather's tubes of money; and/or Robin's grandmother's lumps under the carpet.***

Howard's tubes. My grandparents lived through the depression and from it my grandfather lost confidence in banks. So he developed the practice of never having too much money in any one bank, nor in any one county in Ohio. So when he died it was a real challenge to find where he has stored all his money. He also kept large amounts of cash around the house. He worried about a fire burning down the house and all this cash, so he would go to the hardware store and purchase short cast iron pipes, have them threaded on both ends, and get caps to fit on the threads. Then he'd stuff them full of \$20 and hide them all around the house. My grandmother was finding these for years after he died.

Lola's lumps. My wife's grandmother was the "banker" in the family, and they also suffered through the depression. Grandma Lola's way to hide cash around the house was to hide it under the carpet. This made the floor a bit lumpy in places. The rest of us knew what was there but ignored it.

### ***The point:***

We may have walked across Jeremiah's field so often we've worn a path, but never imagined that a treasure lay underneath. We may have walked through Grandpa Howard's house many times but never known the wealth that was stashed just out of sight. And we may have experienced Grandma Lola's hospitality many times and just thought she needed to fix the lumpy floors. But just below the surface, only partly obscured by human idiosyncrasies, are riches. And when we understand this, we are ready to empty our pockets to buy that field... or house.

## **Pearl merchant: Matt 13.45**

"The kingdom of heaven is like a collector in search of a 1956 Mickey Mantle card in mint condition; on finding one, he sells all that he has and buys that card." *(I still have my baseball card collection from the 1950s, and it includes a Mickey Mantle – though not in mint condition. So I used it as a prop.)*

"The kingdom of heaven is like one of us finding a beautiful home in Cupertino for \$150,000; on finding it, we sell all that we have and buy that house." *(Cupertino is a very high priced area, with the median house price nearly \$1M in 2011).*

### ***Look at it this way:***

One day Jesus walked around his creation, looked at the people and knew their potential, and saw a great treasure for the Kingdom of God. The people he saw didn't

perceive themselves as any great treasure, but Jesus did. So much so that he gave his very life for the treasure of our presence as his brothers/sisters in God's family (or fellow citizens in the Kingdom of God).

**How about you? Have you given all of yourself for your place in the Kingdom?**

<b>Other resources:</b>
Sorry, no Google Slides or audio file for this sermon.