# *The Kingdom of God is like a Dandelion…*

The 10th Sunday after Pentecost, July 24, 2005

1 Kings 3:5-12 Psalm 119:121-136 Romans 8:26-34 Matthew 13:31-33,44-49a

Our cat, Jibran, has a new favorite past-time. You see, we bought a birdfeeder a few weeks ago, and hung it on the fire-escape of our 3rd floor apartment. Lately, it has been discovered by a family of house sparrows, and in the mornings there can easily be a dozen little chirping birds fluttering around the feeder. Jibran is ecstatic. He stands on his hind feet, elbows on the window sill, aquiver with joy.

I think if Jibran were listening to today's parables about the Kingdom of God, his attention would focus entirely on the birds of the air making nests in the mustard bush. For him, the birds are certainly a sign of God's love and abundance!

Now Jesus' audience also would have had their attention caught by this parable, but for a different reason. God's reign had indeed already been compared by the prophet Ezekiel to a giant cedar tree where the birds of the air would make their nests.

But Jesus seems to be comparing God's coming reign to a weed. A weed that is invasive, impossible to remove, prolific beyond measure, taking over where it is not wanted. A weed that tradition states should be kept *out* of any garden. A weed that does not turn into a tree, by the way, but at best into a large shrub.

[By the way, if your noticing that the preacher has a fixation on weeds…blame the Gospel writer instead: Weeds crop up throughout this *pericope*, passage, of Matthew's – I think it was a mnemonic, a memory device helping Matthew and the oral and written traditions before him, to group together and remember these parables about the Kingdom]

We've heard these parables so often – the mighty mustard seed, the treasure hidden in the field, the yeast hidden in the flour -- that they've lost their shock value. When I read this gospel lesson at the start of the week, I didn't think about mustard being an aggressive, undesirable weed; or that women and yeast were more often biblical images of the unclean, rather than of God's reign; Or the dishonesty inherent in the story of the treasure buried in the field. So I've updated these parables; let those who aren't plugged into their iPods, listen!

*The kingdom of heaven is like a dandelion which someone planted in their lawn. By the end of the summer, there are enormous dandelions everywhere, so many that children make crowns and necklaces from them.*

*The kingdom of heaven is like a pimple-faced teenager who writes a computer virus and sends it in an e-mail; it is a tiny piece of code, but it will infect everything!*

*The kingdom of heaven is like an accountant who finds a million dollars buried in a forgotten line-item. He hides it again in the spreadsheet, and with joy goes out and starts a shell corporation so he can embezzle the money.*

*The kingdom of heaven is like a realtor, who on seeing a waterfront mansion, sells her own home and car and furniture and life insurance policy and children's savings so that she can buy that house.*

*The kingdom of heaven is a pile boxes in an attic, full of treasures and trash. When the house is sold, the new owners will go*

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*through the boxes, taking the beautiful things to sell and throwing everything else out.*

Jesus is clear about a lot of things: Love God. Love your neighbor. But like the woman who hides, *krypto*, hides the yeast in the flour, Jesus is cryptic about the Kingdom of God. He shocks his audience with parables of invasive weeds, sneaking embezzlers, avaricious merchants, lowly women and indiscriminate dragnets.

I believe Jesus was trying to break his audience free from a self-centered theology which could fit God almighty into a tiny box. An over-confident theology that felt it know exactly what God's reign would be (and who would benefit by it). A dominating theology that felt that God's reign was identical with their own political and racial ambitions. A kind of theology still at large in the world.

I don't believe Jesus was calling for ignorance, but I do believe he was calling for foolishness – The foolishness of the cross. The foolishness of a God who raises up the lowly while humbling empires and powers and principalities. The foolishness of a God who makes humanity in God's image, and does so out of dust and spit. The foolishness of a God whose imperial reign is as tenacious, invasive and omnipresent
as a noxious weed.

Last night, Iza and I were talking on the phone. She had just watched the Iranian movie *Children of Heaven,* and it made her think about grace. Iza said to me, "Grace operates independently of your consciousness. In fact, it operates in *spite* of your consciousness."

And the message I take from the Gospel this week is to let God's abundant love come about in my life without my having to *comprehend* it first; to let God's reign invade my life like dandelions in a lawn, scattered and foolish and difficult to uproot.

Since May, we've been hearing from Paul's letter to the Romans. Next week, I hope to talk a little about that letter; today I want to close with Paul's reminder about the impossibility of comprehending God. I hope these words speak freedom to you, freedom to enjoy the invasive promise of God's imperial rule, in the mystery of the Eucharist, the deep sighs of prayer, the foolishness that wonderfully infects our church:

*The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.*

*And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*


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