

Have you ever thought about the role that expectations play in your life? Think about a young couple preparing for marriage. Of course, they're looking for the perfect soul mate; someone who accepts them as they are and fulfills all their desires. They want a low maintenance partner who meets their needs and makes almost no claims on them. I get many opportunities in counseling couples to guard against unmet expectations.

Think about the expectation people have when they take a new job. Whenever we hire people at CPC, we try to have a conversation with them about their expectations of working at a church. They tend to think everyone walks serenely around with a big smile on their face, passing along blessings and prayers at the water cooler. But it doesn't work that way. They're going to discover the church is led by flawed people, who in their passion to serve, will sometimes butt heads! It's all about counseling through expectations.

Historian Daniel Boorstin suggests Americans suffer from all-too-extravagant expectations. He said, "We expect anything and everything. We expect the contradictory and the impossible. We expect compact cars which are spacious; luxurious cars which are economical. We expect to be rich and charitable, powerful and merciful, active and reflective, kind and competitive... We expect to eat and stay thin, to be constantly on the move and ever more neighborly, to go to a 'church of our choice' and yet feel its guiding power over us, to revere God and to be God. Never have people been more the masters of their environment. Yet never has a people felt more deceived and disappointed. For never has a people expected so much more than the world could offer."

Think of this with me as it relates to our expectations of God. What are your expectations of how God will work in your life? How do you expect God to work in this world? Have you ever wondered, "Why doesn't God do more?" Tragedies happen. Horrific accidents devastate lives and families. Tyrants and bullies force their will on good people, crushing those who oppose them, and seem to get away with it. And so we ask, "Why doesn't God do something?" Have you ever asked the question, "Is this as good as it gets?" And our expectant answer is, "I hope not!"

I believe this was the question many of Jesus' followers were asking. When it came to the Messiah, they had high expectations. Most truly believed he'd start a winnable war to overthrow Rome and begin ruling as king from Jerusalem. Today is Palm Sunday. On that first Palm Sunday when Jesus descended from Mt. Olivet and entered into the Holy City of Jerusalem through the East Gate, the crowd of people that lined the pathway had massive expectations. Luke's gospel tells us as Jesus neared Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, "*the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once*" (Luke 19:11). So when they saw their King betrayed, arrested, flogged and crucified, it didn't make any sense.

Why didn't God do something? Why doesn't God do something? In the passage we're looking at today, Jesus answers that question by way of

three parables. In each one he begins with the words, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." In other words, the kingdom that Jesus inaugurated by his first coming will take on characteristics of what we read in these parables. These parables offer us a picture of how Jesus' kingdom worked then, now, and will work in the future.

What is the kingdom of God? It's the community to which every Christian belongs and is called to live in and represent. The kingdom of God has one true King, who is Jesus, and within that kingdom are citizens, believers or followers of Christ. In some places in Scripture citizens are described as sons and daughters of the King. In other places citizens are described as servants of the King.

Phillip Yancy describes the kingdom in this manner: "It's here, but it's coming. It's radical but not political. It's invisible yet visible."

We also know that up to one third of all of Jesus' teachings are about the subject of the kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew Chapter 13, verses 24-43 is our text today. In total, chapter 13 contains seven kingdom parables that explain kingdom life. Last week we took a good long look at the parable of the sower. Today we will study three more kingdom parables.

The Kingdom of Heaven is Like the Wheat and the Weeds

Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. (Matthew 13:24-26)

Like the Parable of the Sower from last week, Jesus once again uses the figure of a farmer sowing seed in his field. But here the emphasis is not what happens to the good seed, but instead what happens to the bad seed that the enemy came and sowed. While the farmers servants slept the farmers enemy came and sowed weed seeds in the farmer's fields. A likely weed was called "darnel." Darnel closely resembles wheat and is almost impossible to distinguish until the wheat matures and ripens and makes grain over time.

"The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?'

"'An enemy did this,' he replied.

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' (verses 27-28)

So one option suggested by the servants was to weed the field, to go and try to pull up all the weeds to protect the wheat. But this wasn't a good option because as you can see you can't tell the difference between the

immature weeds and the immature wheat. Even if you could tell them apart, this type of weed becomes intertwined together at the roots so pulling the weed would kill the young wheat plant. Instead the landowner said to his servants.

“No,” he answered, “because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.” (verses 29–30)

The landowner said let them grow up over time together and mature together. Jesus audience knew that once the wheat matured and formed grain, it would look very different from the weeds. He said, “at the harvest we will separate and store the wheat and burn the weeds.”

The normal thing to do would be to root out the weeds as soon as they are noticed. One of the things this parable is intending to teach us is patience. It's this strange patience of the farmer that stands out in the story so far.

And this story is supposed to challenge our expectations of God. It reveals to me God is far more patient than I am. My expectation is for him to weed out all the evil and suffering right now. But God says he'll take care of it later.

We serve what we might call a slow God. Most of us want a fast God. But God is slow. He's slow in judging the wicked. And the reason for that is he longs for them to turn to him before it's too late. You see, he loves them; he loves weeds! And we were all weeds once. Listen to what the apostle Peter said, **“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance”** (2 Peter 3:9). Is it odd to you that a holy God is more patient with sinners than we are?

God chooses to unveil his kingdom over time. God's kingdom and the kingdom's of the world will coexist for a season. While God grows his kingdom, the devil sows evil and does all he can to stop God's work in our world.

Those shouting Hosanna with expectation that first Palm Sunday wanted a kingdom established by the armies of heaven, but for this first entrance into the Holy City of Jerusalem the King rode a donkey, a symbol of peace to establish his kingdom of peace. His kingdom would be established by his death and resurrection, and his kingdom would grow, not through violence, but by it's citizens denying self, taking up their own crosses and even loving their enemies. As he taught this unpopular message, the numbers of his followers thinned out because he wasn't meeting their expectations.

The signal from Jesus to take up arms against Rome never came. Attempts by the crowd to crown him king by force were rejected and he would quickly withdraw. When Peter took out his short sword to fight worldly kingdom attacks on Jesus, Jesus rebuked him and healed the man that Peter wounded.

And the same for today, this kingdom will be established not by political means, but by sharing our lives, our good word, our resources with our neighbors, by serving our peninsula public schools, by serving the least among us in San Mateo, by providing gospel centered community for

those struggling in addiction, and many more examples you and I can cite where God uses us as his kingdom builders.

This parable compels us to ask this question: “How can kingdom citizens thrive in this world where good and evil co-exist?”

The next couple parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast help answer this question

The Kingdom of Heaven is Like the Mustard Seed

He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.” (verses 31–32)

In Jesus day, mustard seeds were the smallest known seeds.. The seed came to be the symbol for small beginnings. But as small as mustard seeds are, a mustard plant can grow to the height of 12 to 15 feet. A mustard plant can easily dominate all the other plants in the garden. So what lessons does this parable teach us about God's kingdom?

In God's kingdom, what starts **small** will become **large**.

Think back to Jesus' own small beginnings. He was born in an insignificant setting, a stable, to insignificant parents, a young peasant girl and her peasant carpenter husband, and grew up in an insignificant place, Nazareth. Do you remember what Nathanael, one of his disciples said when he first heard about Jesus, **“Can anything good come from Nazareth?”** It's so small and insignificant.

The Christian kingdom started small, at Pentecost, when the Spirit of God came upon 120 believers hiding out in Jerusalem. When Jesus ascended to heaven his kingdom was like a mustard seed. This kingdom that started small would one day bless the world.

And you and I are a microcosm of God's kingdom. The small seed of God's Word sown by his Holy Spirit into us starts small but has potential to grow large. The hope we have is Christ who began a good work in us will complete that work in his due time for his praise and glory.

In God's kingdom, what starts **small** will **bless the world**.

The figure of this small seed resulting in a large plant, almost a tree, so large birds could make nests in it. Nests mean protection and safety. Nests are life giving.

In the Old Testament there was a king named Nebuchadnezzar who had a dream. In his dream there was this really tall tree. It was so large and tall it could be seen by the whole earth. Its leaves were lush, its fruit was abundant and delicious, and in it was food for all. The animals found shade under it, and birds nested in the branches. Then Daniel in Daniel chapter four explained the dream to the king. He told the king that his Babylonian kingdom was the greatest of all kingdoms, and that it brought prosperity to a large part of the world.

Jesus followers understood the connection. The kingdom of God would start small and grow to bless all the Gentile nations, essentially people from every nation, tribe and tongue who can find shelter in the kingdom of Heaven as represented by the mustard tree.

By the time Jesus taught this parable, Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian Empire no longer existed. At the time of Jesus the largest garden plant

was the pagan kingdom we know as the Roman Empire and in a few centuries it would no longer exist either.

And where was the Egyptian Empire or the Assyrian Empire? They no longer fill the garden. But the kingdom of heaven, that little seed Jesus planted 2000 years ago, has grown into a tree and Jesus' kingdom continues to grow and bless all nations.

Be encouraged not just by what God is doing globally. Be encouraged personally too. God's kingdom is alive and well around you, and alive and well in you. His kingdom is able to spread through you, over time, as God wills. As God's citizens, as his kingdom ambassadors every small thing we do and say, as it relates to the kingdom of God within us, blesses our corner of the world.

Speaking of kingdom work, CPC's outreach to homeless veterans continues to bless vets on the peninsula with practical and gospel help. Yesterday our Veteran's Outreach team did a very cool thing. They got a banner with their name on it and they marched in a community parade in San Mateo. I have tracked how God has used this team. It started with a very small group of vets at CPC who saw the need to help homeless vets find housing, furnishings, and county social services, while modeling and sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. They would be the first to tell you it's a small effort, but we see the small work by a few kingdom Citizens blessing the world. If you hadn't heard, The San Mateo County recently gave the CPC Homeless Veteran's Outreach a nonprofit entrepreneurial service award for blessing our surrounding community. I love it when our surrounding community feels blessed by CPC!

While the story of the mustard seed celebrates smallness, the next parable celebrates the unique hiddenness of the kingdom. What is the kingdom of heaven like?

The Kingdom of Heaven is like Yeast

I remember a family vacation we took years ago when our girls were teens. We spent the day at Disneyland and the California Adventure Park. I'm not crazy about fast rides, especially ones that jerk you in the dark. Julie and I headed over to the California Adventure Park and left the girls at Disneyland for a couple of hours. It was hot. I mean 105 in the shade. We were slowing down a little, and we sat on a bench and looked up at one ride called the Tower of Terror.

You start out 13 floors up and you are on a simulated runaway elevator, which jerks you up and down, out and in. I'm starting to feel sick right now even thinking about it. Julie said, "Let's go on the ride. Come on. We don't need the girls, lets go." I said, "No way". And I looked around for a slower ride.

Next to the Tower of Terror was a place called the Sourdough Factory. You could go in and see how San Francisco sourdough bread is made. Just the right speed for me. I said, "Hey, Julie, instead of the Tower of Terror ride, Let's go on the "How they make Sourdough Bread ride". She rolled her eyes, and said, "Come on grandpa, I mean Dan" So we went. It was the story of the Boudin Bakery. We were the youngest ones in there for sure. Did you know that the Boudin Bakery was established in 1849, and the sourdough yeast strain they used to make the first loaf in 1849 is the same yeast strain they preserve and continue to use to make their sourdough today? At the end of the tour they gave us a sample. I ate a delicious piece of sourdough bread that had a yeast strain that went

back over 150 years. Day after day, year after year for the past 150 years, they make their sourdough by tearing off a piece of leavened dough to be set aside and inserted into the next batch of sourdough.

Verse 33 says,

He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough." (verse 33)

In every household in Jesus' day, the person responsible for baking bread would save a piece of leavened dough from a risen batch before it was baked. When the next batch was mixed she took the saved piece from the previous batch and hid it in the new batch in order that the yeast could ferment the new batch and make it rise.

What is the unique hidden thing revealed through this parable of the Yeast? What starts hidden becomes impactful. A small piece of starter can influence 60 pounds of flour, so our seemingly small investments in people can, over time, have a large impact. And this kingdom impact comes from within.

As kingdom citizens we are to penetrate and permeate our world, like a little yeast in a whole lump of dough, and overtime the impact will be seen and tasted by many.

Both of these parables are about things that start small and hidden, inconspicuous as we say, but with patience and time they make a great impact. This is a great encouragement to me as a pastor and it should be to all of us at CPC. We've been planted or hidden right here on the San Francisco Peninsula. Appearances can be deceiving. We may be small, we may be hidden, we may be outnumbered, but we trust this message of the kingdom to take root and spread and impact many. That should encourage you as well as you go to work tomorrow, as you care for your children, your parents or love your neighbors. Don't disdain smallness or hiddenness. Despite appearances, the kingdom of God is at work and will ultimately triumph.

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. (verses 36–39)

His closest disciples had their own expectations as well. They wanted to see the harvest right away. But Jesus said, "Tame your expectations!" There will be a judgment, but it will be a future judgment.

The righteous and the wicked will coexist in the world until the end. Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is here, but the ungodly will still do their thing just as they continue to do their thing today." So in the parable Jesus said, "Look, you **can** expect God to do something, but it won't happen until the end of the age. It won't happen until the harvest. You have to be patient. My kingdom is here, but it's not completely fulfilled. So you need to be prepared to live and grow in an environment that's not ideal."

You might be distressed by what's going on around you, but be patient and wait. God says wait, but what do we do as we wait?

One way Christ-followers have dealt with the reality of weeds has been to retreat. To somehow try to build their own protected enclave where they don't have to deal with any weeds. Instead of conquering them they run from them and try to find or create a weedless environment in which to live and raise their kids. I mean, here we are living on the San Francisco Peninsula, one of the most weed-infested areas in the entire nation. Some people think, what an awful place to live!

But some of us are asking, "How can we grow and thrive here as followers of Jesus? How can we raise our kids to be God-fearing people in that godless environment?"

I take comfort when I think of Jesus saying to us, "I'm the sower and that's where I planted you. And, yes, you must be discerning and careful. Yes, there are things to protect your kids from. Yes, you do need to resist evil. But you can grow here; you can still bear fruit in this environment."

There is another insight in this story. In the end there is still a harvest of wheat. The wheat was **not** destroyed by the weeds. You don't have to move away to grow as wheat. You can live, grow, and bear fruit right here in the midst of lots of weeds!

And the same applies to life in the church. Churches have weeds in them too. If you're looking for a weedless church, you will be doing a lot of church hopping because you'll never find one. That doesn't mean we shouldn't hold one another accountable or confront sin in the church. Jesus will teach us about church discipline a few chapters later in Matthew 18. But the truth of the matter is we have to be patient with one another as well. We have to be patient with a Christian community that isn't and never will be perfect until Christ returns.

So we can't pull the weeds out and we can't retreat, either. So what do we do? Can we really make a difference? What will happen when God brings in the harvest at the end of the age?

"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (verses 40–42)

First, "everything (everyone) that causes sin and all who do evil" will be pulled up and thrown into the fire. This is biblical imagery of hell. It does not mean there will be a real furnace, but it pictures the ultimate torment and sorrow of those who belong to the evil one.

Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear. (verse 43)

Second, "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." At harvest time the contrast between the wheat and the weeds will become amazingly stark. No one would question the difference. The wheat will ripen to a glorious maturity.

The prophet Zechariah described, in chapter nine of his book, the events of that first Palm Sunday. The Messiah would stand on Mt. Olivet just east of Jerusalem and gaze out over the Holy City. And then he would mount a donkey and he would descend into the Valley of Kidron and up the slope to the East Gate and enter the city as the King of peace to the cheering crowd full of expectations.

But Zechariah also describes a future event that will take place in the same place. An event we just learned is described in the parable of the wheat and the weeds. Zechariah chapter 14 tells us, that on that glorious and terrible day of the future harvest when all the wheat is mature, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ will return to the Mt. of Olives. Zechariah picks up the story, on that day...

Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him. (Zechariah 14:3–5)

He entered the city from the east, the first time on as the King of Peace on a donkey. The second time he will enter as the conqueror, not only standing again on the Mt. of Olives but splitting the mountain in two, one to the north and one to the south, with a pathway running east to west from the Mt. of Olives to the east gate of Jerusalem. This is Jesus' second coming. He will come and enter his holy city not on a donkey this time, but as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords with his army of holy ones following him into battle to bring justice to the world. And on that future day, the kingdom will come in its fullest sense.

The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name. (Zechariah 14:9)

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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