

SERMON TITLE: "Parables of Growth: Mustard, Yeast, and Treasures"  
SERMON TEXT: Matthew 13:31-33 and 44-53  
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James  
OCCASION: July 30, 2023, at First United Methodist Church

### **INTRODUCTION**

This week, I read an article in the news that declared that August 5 is National Mustard Day. In honor of that upcoming event, the McCormick spice and sauce company has collaborated with the Mars candy company to make a limited combination of Skittles candy flavored like French's Mustard. In years past, French's Mustard had flavored donuts and ice cream, but this year the McCormick parent company decided Skittles would be their mustard's ticket to fun and fame. To celebrate this National Mustard Day event, French's will be hitting the road in a bright yellow vintage bus nicknamed the Mustard Mobile. Beginning tomorrow in Atlanta, the bus will then travel through Washington, D.C. and end up in New York City on August 5. Wherever the bus stops along the way, customers will be able to try out the limited-edition Skittles that taste like mustard.

Because I'm not a fan of regular Skittles, I doubt I'd like the mustard-flavored ones. But I do like how nicely that news story fits in with the Parables of Growth we're talking about today. In the past two Sundays, we talked about Jesus' other parables in Matthew 13--about the parable of seeds and soils and about the parable of wheat and weeds. And now, we're going to continue this series of agricultural parables from Matthew 13. In case you hadn't noticed before, Jesus' purpose in telling these parables of growth was to describe what the kingdom of heaven is like. Let's see what we can learn about God's kingdom from Jesus' parables of mustard, yeast, and treasures.

### **1—MUSTARD**

In Matthew 13:31-32, Jesus described the kingdom of heaven as a mustard seed that someone planted in a field. It was the tiniest of seeds, but it grew into a shrub so large that it was like a tree. The growth from this seed was so significant that birds were able to nest in the mustard tree's branches.

To me, this parable signifies that, in God's kingdom, even the tiniest things and even the smallest persons can have amazing potential and power. The mustard seed's motto would be, "Don't underestimate me." And that's what we should always remember about God's kingdom. The Gospel of Matthew uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven," which makes us think of a celestial paradise that comes after we die. But Jesus frequently spoke of God's kingdom as being near and among us, and Jesus taught his disciples to pray that God's kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven. So, the idea of the tiny mustard seed growing into a tree that could support the life of birds tells us that Jesus expected God's kingdom to grow even here and even now.

Those listening to Jesus' parables 2000 years ago probably couldn't have imagined what would happen when they began sharing Jesus' stories with other people. It would have been difficult to envision that their little seeds of faith would grow into a powerful religion that would spread and influence the entire world. But it has! Christianity has become a giant tree with so many branches and nests where faith is hatched and nurtured. And we, too, play a role in this, as we do our small part. Whether we volunteer to help in the church nursery, sign up to host fellowship after worship, invite someone to come to church, read a Bible story to our grandkids, pray for someone going through a rough time, or help out someone in need—whatever little thing we do to serve God helps the kingdom to grow. In the kingdom of God's miraculous growing power, we are not too little to make a difference. With God's help, we mustard seeds are mighty!

## **2—YEAST**

The next parable Jesus tells is found in verse 33. There Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven like yeast that a woman mixed in with flour until it was all leavened. Flour alone has some nutritional value, but when mixed with yeast and a little water and oil, it can become a whole loaf of bread that can feed a family.

Because we talk and pray about it regularly in this congregation, you know that I am invested in trying to help our Cuban immigrant friends Yainier and Yusimi, and their relatives who are still in Cuba. Yainier's 31-year old sister is Yisel. Her 5-year old daughter is Alisson. Yisel and I communicate a few times a week using What's App. If you aren't familiar with that, What's App is a way to send text messages to people in foreign countries. In our conversations, Yisel and I sometimes talk about food and what we're cooking. Because there's an extreme shortage of food in Cuba, Yisel has to be quite creative in using whatever food might be available to buy. On Monday, Yisel sent me a picture of some bread balls she had made with flour, oil, water, and some spices. She felt quite fortunate that she had been able to find and buy a bag of seasonings for about two U.S. dollars. A little bit of seasoning added to the flour mixture made their basic and meager food seem less boring.

When we here at First UMC donate to the Cuban ministry fund to help Yisel and Alisson and Yusimi's two sons Mikael and Christian, we are like the yeast the woman put into her flour. We make current miseries a little easier to bear, and we give hope that better days are ahead. We offer food for the body and nutrition for the soul. And this, I believe, is what God's kingdom is like. I know that working with immigrants isn't what we do most naturally. Most of us have never had any experience in this type of ministry before this past year. But I think we can be proud and glad that God has sent us this opportunity to grow as the yeast in the flour of God's kingdom.

### **3—TREASURES**

In Matthew 13:44-53, Jesus told some more parables that helped describe the kingdom of heaven. Most of those parables can fit under the idea of treasures. Someone found treasure hidden in a field, and he sold all that he had so he could buy the field and its treasure. Likewise, a merchant found a pearl of great value, and he sold all he had so he could buy that fine pearl. Similarly, fishers threw a net into the sea and caught fish of every kind. Some fish weren't worth keeping, but many were good. And,

finally, Jesus even told about a scribe telling parables. From his repertoire of stories, the scribe could pull out treasures new and old.

As I was working on this sermon in my church office on Thursday evening, a mother deer came up by my office windows. I could tell from her udder that she was nursing a baby. Then I caught a glimpse of her speckled fawn. Some of you might have seen the pictures I posted on our church's Facebook page. The deer are some of the treasures that I notice in this big field around our church. Other treasures hidden here are coveys of quail. Mostly we have magpies, but sometimes we'll see some geese or a pheasant. A couple summers ago, we had killdeer parents that pretended their wings were broken to try and lure us away from their eggs in a nest among the rocks on the ground.

God's treasures are wonderful to behold, and they're abundant in the field around us. Whether we think of the field as the church yard, the neighborhood where our house is, the company we work for, our extended family, our school, this beautiful state of Utah, or the entirety of the earth and the universe, there are so many treasures that are amazing and awe-inspiring.

Of course, the treasure which is most valuable of all is our Savior Jesus Christ. If we are going to sell everything we have in order to buy any kind of treasure, I hope that treasure would be the one that is of ultimate value. Jesus also spoke about these things in Matthew chapter six. There he told us not to worry about material things, because God would provide what we need. Jesus taught that we can't serve both God and wealth. And he advised his listeners not to store up treasures on earth that can be destroyed by moths and thieves, but rather to store up treasures in heaven where they will be safe and hold eternal value. Jesus said that where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. I hope that the treasure we value most will be having Jesus in our hearts, for he is the one who reigns in God's kingdom.

### **CONCLUSION**

On Friday morning, I heard a news story on the radio about an engaged couple in New England who were dining in a restaurant, when the woman found a pearl in the clam she was eating. Experts

indicate that such a fine pearl would have taken 50 years to grow inside that clam. The couple then decided to use that lovely pearl in the woman's engagement ring. They used that treasure-found-in-a-clam-from-the-ocean as a symbol of the treasure of love that was growing in the couple's hearts.

Whether we're talking about the growth of mustard, yeast, or treasures, the idea is the same. All these are descriptors of the kingdom of heaven. All these parables remind us that God's kingdom is growing, and most importantly, can be growing in our hearts.