

## **DYNAMIC GROWTH FLOWS FROM INNER TRANSFORMATION**

Nineth Sunday after Pentecost

July 26, 2026

Jesus spoke in today's reading about the kingdom of heaven being like a tiny mustard seed that grew to a large plant; The kingdom of heaven, like yeast mixed in flour until all of it was leavened; The kingdom of heaven like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and in his joy went and sold all that he had to buy that field; the kingdom of heaven like a merchant who found a pearl of great value, and sold all that he had and bought it; and the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind.

The passage begins with the mustard seed. Jesus said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." These tiny mustard seeds seem to defy all natural odds. Depending on the variety, these plants can grow to as much as 10 to 20 feet tall. But their growth depends on the right kind of nutritious soil to thrive.

The kingdom of God that Jesus came to establish is much like that mustard plant; seemingly miniscule and insignificant; initially nothing more than a small band of twelve mostly backwoods fishermen. Not a single religious scholar among them. No one having graduated from the Harvard Online School of Business.

Jesus' ministry, instead of focusing on the professional class, reached out to the simple, common, ordinary unimpressive; salt of the earth kind of people; day-laborers and peasants and housewives and craftsmen.

Those people belonging to the Way of Jesus, multiplied so quickly, that even the birds of the air made their home there. This phrase, "birds of the air," was an idiom referring to wild birds, rather than domesticated fowl. The people that Jesus attracted were often rough and tumble kinds of people. People like Simon Peter and Zacchaeus, the tax collector, and the Roman centurion, and an adulterous.

In establishing his father's kingdom, Jesus elevated the status of the lower classes and the outcasts. His gathering of followers disrupted the social structure of Jewish society. You could find religious leaders sitting next to, and learning alongside, a tax collector who worked for Rome. Yes, this was the kingdom of God his heavenly Father had revealed to him. A kingdom that went about transforming corrupt and broken institutions and systems into ones more like the realm of God.

Jesus had been called by his Abba God to do more than establish a church; more than gathering a warm loving growing community that looked out for each other and enjoyed worshipping and socializing together. His purpose; God's purpose; was to transform individual lives. And as they were transformed; and as their community was transformed; they would transform the world.

Jesus' work looked radically different than many other faith communities of his day, because he saw a different world than the one seen by the religious people around him. He had transcended the natural human level of

consciousness, and had entered the realm of unitive consciousness, where he saw ALL creation as one together in love; friends and neighbors and birds and trees and even former enemies.

And in this transformed consciousness, Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies as well; to love them into his father's kingdom. This realm of God was so radically counter-cultural, that most people could not envision it. His disciples could not see it at first.

What enabled Jesus to see in this transformational new way? And no, the answer is not simply that he was the Son of God, as true as that statement may be. Jesus had to grow in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man just like everybody else. The answer is found here in Matthew chapter thirteen. Unfortunately, these three verses were not included in the Revised Common Lectionary readings this month. They are mentioned after Jesus told the parable of the Sower to the crowds, and before he explained the parable to his disciples. These three crucial verses are key to Jesus' personal transformation, and to ours as well.

In Matthew 13:13-15 Jesus said: "The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: 'You will indeed listen but never understand, and you will indeed look but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes, so that they might not look with their eyes, and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them.'" The key phrase in this passage are the words: "For this people's heart has grown dull." Jesus told his disciples that Isaiah's words were true of many people; that their hearts had grown

dull. It has been true of my life as well. In seeing, I still did not perceive, and in hearing, I still did not listen or understand. My heart had grown dull, and my ears, hard of hearing.

What is this heart that Jesus and Isaiah speak of? It is much more than the seat of our emotions. The Christian spirituality developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola explains well the meaning of the heart. The heart is the core of our entire being—of our deepest desires, values, and inner orientation. St. Ignatius taught that God communicates to us through all the interior movements of our hearts; like the experience of joy, peace, a deep communion with God, as well as a sense of confusion, or desolation. The heart is much more than our intellectual understanding. The goal of our journey of faith is to move beyond a knowledge of God, and thinking about God, to a deeper experiential knowing of God; a sense of Oneness with Divinity.

In my lifetime, I have from time to time, had a profound encounter with God; occasionally experiencing a deep intimacy with God. But a deep abiding journey of Oneness and intimacy with God; of knowing God's inner movements within the human heart were beyond my grasp, that is, until May of this year. I am thankful that; like Ignatius of Loyola; my eyes are now open a little.

The priest and author Timothy Gallagher says that Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus, came to a point in his life when his eyes were opened a little. Gallagher poses a series of questions for each of us: "How aware are we of our own interior spiritual experience? How habitually are we aware of it? How often do we turn to this awareness during the day? Do we ever consciously stop to become aware of what is stirring spiritually within us?"

This is a major question in the spiritual life, and it cannot be emphasized too much.” Then Gallagher refers to St. Augustine of Hippo: “Augustine, as he reviews in his *Confessions* the moment when his own eyes were ‘opened a little,’ writes his classic words: ‘You were within, and I was without...You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness.’ Looking back over his experience, Augustine realizes that God was active within him, in his heart, in his interior world, and that he, Augustine, was without, looking outward, fixed on the world beyond himself, unaware of God’s activity within him...All too often the culture that surrounds us lives ‘without,’ unaware of a divine activity ‘within.’ And we ourselves, more often than we would want, find our awareness focused ‘without,’ less aware than we would like of what is happening ‘within.’” Then Gallagher ends with this challenge: “be aware, Seek to be sufficiently ‘within’ so that what is stirring spiritually within our hearts becomes present to our consciousness.” If you and I avoid taking up Gallagher’s challenge, then we will live out the rest of our lives with dull hearts; hearts that are not open and listening to the beautiful glorious loving music our Beloved God sings to us.

I am thankful that now my eyes have opened a little. I know the joy that this bit of knowing the inner workings of my Divine Love has brought to me. And in this opening, I deeply long and yearn for further openings; for more transformations yet to come. Much more Oneness with God and creation yet to perceive and understand.

Here is the heart of the matter for all of us as children of God. Christianity, and the kingdom of God that Jesus taught and demonstrated, is about so much more than our weekend services and creeds and catechism and service work and studies, as crucial and as important as all those things are.

The deep meaning of our faith is that God continually, patiently, calls and woos us towards more and more Oneness in intimacy with God's-self and with all creation; to love and know God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves. May we continue this fulfilling, glorious, joy-filled journey.