

An Order of Worship for the Home

August 23, 2020

Metaphors for the Kingdom from Matthew 13, week 3



This service is written for two speakers. Ideally, family members can speak and declare God's grace to one another following this format. For those who live alone, this worship outline can be followed with a brother or sister in Christ over the phone. You may call on a friend to fill this role, or your elder or pastor can worship with you by phone.

There is an "offering prayer" included in this outline. As we shelter in place, please continue to worship through giving. You can mail offering envelopes and checks to Calvary or visit www.calvaryslz.org to give online.

Invocation

Reader 1: The kingdom is where the King reigns.
Reader 2: He reigns in our hearts. The kingdom of heaven is here!
Reader 1: We gather in the name of the King who is...
Reader 2: Father, Son and Holy Spirit...
Together: Amen.

Psalm 78:1-7

¹ Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth!
² I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old,
³ things that we have heard and known,
that our fathers have told us.
⁴ We will not hide them from their children,
but tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.
⁵ He established a testimony in Jacob
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our fathers
to teach to their children,
⁶ that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,

and arise and tell them to their children,
7 so that they should set their hope in God
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments;

Confession & Absolution

Make sure each person present has opportunity to confess to a brother or sister in faith. Go through both parts as many times as needed to accommodate all who are gathered.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

Christian Confessing: I have treasured the wrong things, and I have sought to build my own kingdom. I am sorry for this. God, you alone are my King. I humble myself before your rule, and I ask that you would allow me to serve in your kingdom. Forgive me for the sake of your Son, Jesus, and his suffering and death.

Christian Responding: Your King has heard your confession. You are loved and forgiven! He welcomes you home as his child. The faith on which your confession is founded is a gift from your God, and in this faith you are saved. As Jesus said, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear." (Matthew 13:16)

Together: Amen.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

2 Corinthians 4:1-12

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Message and Gospel Reading (Matthew 13:31-35)

How Big Is Your God?

Two weeks ago, we listened as Jesus told a story about a farmer scattering seeds. Last week, we heard a story about an enemy planting weeds in the wheat field, and the master's plan to wait until harvest to separate the two. Both of these stories were parables, metaphors for what God's reign is like. With each of those stories, Jesus supplied some explanation to his disciples.

This week, we'll hear two more stories from Jesus. These are parables as well, but this time Matthew's gospel does not record any explanation. Instead, we'll

have to listen closely to the stories. Jesus is once teaching about the reign of God.

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. ³² It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." (Matthew 13:31-32)

Most of you have heard this story before. You know the grain of mustard seed is tiny. It's just a speck. The people listening to Jesus knew this too. In fact, they were likely more familiar with mustard seeds than you or I. They had held mustard seeds in their hands. They had planted mustard seeds. Mustard seeds weren't an item in a story for them; mustard seeds were the product of the very mustard plants in their gardens.

That tiny seed grows up and becomes a tree. You know this part too. It's familiar because you've read this story, and you've heard it in church before. It's old information to you. Do you realize, this was new information to the people with Jesus?

It was new, because this is not how you would describe a fully grown mustard plant. After all, would you call a 3 foot tall plant a tree? "Tree" is not the word I would expect. It's not the word the crowds around Jesus expected either.

Here's something that I didn't have opportunity to mention the past two weeks. A commonly found element in a parable is the unexpected or out-of-place. Sometimes that shows up in a character's actions. Sometimes, we see it in exaggeration. It's one of the clues we use to understand what's being taught in the story.

A mustard bush is not usually called a tree, but Jesus tells a story about a tiny mustard seed growing into a tree. If this is what the kingdom of heaven is like, maybe Jesus is attempting to raise a question in the minds and hearts of the crowd.

How big is your God?

Jesus tells the story. He stirs up this unspoken question. Then he tells another.

³³ He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three

measures of flour, till it was all leavened.” (Matthew 13:33)

This is different from the three stories we’ve heard in this series so far. This story is about a woman, and it has nothing to do with farming. Instead, this is domestic work. This is about cooking – baking to be more specific. I can relate better to this one, and maybe you can too. I may never have planted mustard, but I have used yeast to make bread.

Yeast is even smaller than a mustard seed. If a mustard seed is tiny, yeast is teeny tiny. The picture in this story is a woman working three measures of yeast, or leaven, into the flour while making bread dough. The yeast does its work, and the entire batch of dough is leavened.

Now, I can’t say I understand all the ins-and-outs of Bible translation. I’m not always sure why certain decisions are made when we bring concepts from Hebrew or Greek. In the Old Testament, translators seem happy to use foreign names for different measurements. They simply footnote the information so that we know an *ephah* is equal to about 6 gallons, and a *cubit* is about 18 inches. Even New Testament translators retain Greek names for money like *denarius*, *shekel*, and *talent*.

I bring this up, because in the story this woman doesn’t have some generic amount of flour. Our translation says “three measures,” but she adds yeast to three *satons* of flour. A *saton* was a measure of volume. That’s three times a very specific amount. One *saton* is roughly equal to 13 liters. This woman has three *satons* of flour, which amounts to 10 gallons of flour. Imagine how much bread that makes!

I think we’ve found the exaggerated detail within this story. I think we’ve found a clue as to what this parable is about. It seems to reinforce the ideas from the previous story. It sounds like it’s intended to stir the same question.

How big is your God?

After this set of parables – including the Parable of the Weeds which we read last week – Matthew provides this insight.

³⁴ All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. ³⁵ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet:

*“I will open my mouth in parables;
I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation
of the world.” (Matthew 13:34-35)*

The prophet Matthew is quoting is named Asaph, and he was a worship leader who wrote several psalms. The words quoted are from Psalm 78. The opening verses of that psalm were read earlier in our worship.

The psalm opens with several lines about revealing hidden things. Asaph is about to share what we cannot know unless it is told to us. He’s going to tell the next generation what he knows about God, because they will not learn this from the world around them.

Then, Asaph goes on to brag about how big his God is. He wants his readers to realize we have a very BIG God. He is the God who parted the Red Sea. He is the God who defeated the idols of Egypt. He is the God who brought water from a rock so his people could drink. He is the God who miraculously provided daily bread and meat for his people throughout 40 years in the desert.

He is a big God. He’s stronger and more powerful than you expect. He’s more loving, and merciful, and trustworthy than you expect as well. Asaph wants Israel to know their God is big enough to handle all of their biggest issues. He knows that if expectations of God are small, people only bring him small issues. If our expectations place limits on God, we will limit what we ask of him. But...

When you know your God is big, you’ll bring him your biggest issues.

Asaph’s God is your God too. You have a big God! You have a God who died and rose from the dead – there is nothing bigger than that! You have a God who is not bound by death. You have a God who offers to share this amazing new life with you. You have a God who is big enough to handle all your biggest issues.

That’s what Asaph was reminding people. That reminder is why Matthew quotes from Psalm 78. This reality of our big God is why Jesus tells stories about mustard seeds and yeast. You carry expectations about how the world works. Don’t let those expectations set limits on how your God works.

How big is your God? Big enough for your biggest issues.

How big is your God? Big enough for your biggest questions.

How big is your God? Big enough that you can allow people you know to bring their questions too.

Let me make this really practical for us. The idea of a God who is big enough to handle our biggest issues and questions lies at the heart of the conversations we want to have at Alpha. Alpha is about asking big questions.

If we're not sure our God is big enough, we might not want to invite big questions from our friends and family. What if they don't find the answers? What if their questions are bigger than my God or his people can handle?

If we're not sure our God is big enough, we'll hold back our own questions. We'll tell ourselves that asking tough questions is impolite or rude. Plus, sometimes we're afraid if we ask big questions, people might think we're having a crisis of faith. That's not true at all. Actually, if you hold back your biggest questions *that is* the crisis of faith.

Jesus invites us to believe in a big God, despite what we may see around us. He invites us to trust in a big God, despite what the world tells us.

- The mustard seed looks so small. What if I told you, it's going to be bigger than you've ever imagined?
- The yeast appears so insignificant. What if I told you it will change everything it comes in contact with?
- These stories sound so simple. What if I told you, when we allow ourselves to dig a little deeper, there's more than you and I can comprehend in ten lifetimes?
- This Jesus seems so human. What if I told you he is perfectly and completely human, and also perfectly and completely divine? What if I told you he will defeat death? What if I told you he's coming again in glory?
- This faith seems too weak to stand in the face of the arguments and hatred I've heard in our culture. What if I told you there's far more strength than you think? What if I told you, there's also more love than you can fathom? What if I invited your questions, and the questions of your friends, and we explore together?

When you know your God is big, you'll bring him your biggest issues.

His work may appear as a mustard seed. His movement might seem to disappear like yeast overwhelmed by buckets of flour. Don't hold back. He's a big God. You can bring him your biggest concerns. You can bring him your biggest issues. You can bring him the biggest questions you've got.

How big is your God? Bigger than you've ever imagined.

Amen.

Offering Prayer

If you have an offering present as you worship, you may place your hands over it during the offering prayer.

Reader 1: With thankful hearts we receive from you, O Lord.
Reader 2: With thankful hearts we respond.
Reader 1: Receive our thanks and praise.
Reader 2: Receive our offerings.
Together: Receive us as your own.

Prayers and the Lord's Prayer

Share prayer requests with one another. Pray over the requests shared, then pray the Lord's Prayer together.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Blessing (Matthew 28:19-20)

Reader 1: The kingdom of God moves forward, and you move with it.
Reader 2: So make disciples, baptize, and teach.
Reader 1: Do this in the name of the King – the Father, Son and Spirit.
Reader 2: And know that the King goes with you. Always!
Together: Amen.

As applicable, please share this resource with others who would benefit. An electronic version is available at www.calvaryslz.org. We can also add friends to our mailing list if that is preferred.

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