

It's a strange little anecdote. Jesus tells us the Kingdom of God is something like this: A farmer tosses a few bags of seed about their farm, and they go on about their business each day, unaware and unconcerned of the miracle unfolding in front of them. Tiny seeds take on new life, and before you know it, there are flowers that delight the senses, and vegetables and fruits that provide sustenance. Eureka! A feast! And what does that farmer do? The farmer takes sickle to bloom, gobbles up the spoils as if agricultural success just kind of happens. It's NBD, just another harvest!

The Kingdom of God, I would call it the real-time manifestation of experiencing the presence of God in our relationships with others – that's enough-ness, and love, and partnership, and an authentic expression and receipt of mutual gifts – the Kingdom of God provides SO much sustenance, SO much umph, and yet it's SO subtle. The world hardly recognizes its presence; it stays hidden.

And Alcie and Jackson, I have a confession to make. As I look back on my college days, and my post-college days, and seminary days, and even days not so long ago, maybe even yesterday, I think too often, like the farmer, I've put sickle to bloom without realizing the miracle of such sustenance.

Ideas from professors; hallway conversations about life's mysteries; relationships, some for a season, some for a lifetime, that offered space and support; map dots; car rides; compelling paragraphs; deep breaths; experiences provoking a sense of justice, or of wonder, or of empathy, or of joy, or even of pain and grief; meals in this very room; even get shot up in the laser tag arena by the Sardis Youth Group!

To live in this world is to be amid the miraculous everyday – how does God create SO many remarkable creations, and how are we SO lucky to be in the routing and movements of these creations? I think God is inviting us to notice this wonder, to claim this wonder, to share in this wonder. So... I hope in the years to come, you will notice the harvest, and spend at least a little time (yes, we want you to have some time for fun, too!) considering what goes into the harvest, how it transforms you, and how your transformation might lead to transcendent things.

That's where I think this second parable offers additional guidance. The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It's this tiny little thing, no bigger than a speck, and yet it can grow into a shrub great enough to offer shade to the nesting birds. Something very small has the potential to become something very meaningful. But it's more than that.

At every church I've served, I've suggested it sure would be cool to grow a mustard plant in our garden. And the smart gardeners have all replied, "No!!!" Because mustard is an annual, and it's invasive. It gets tangled up in everything. And once it's in your garden, you ain't getting it out.

But imagine for a moment, Alcie and Jackson, your intentionality in understanding the harvest. (By the way, that's not a hard task – I first met Jackson walking in the CROP Walk, and Alcie inspired our Goodness Groceries initiative. So you are two young people who notice your abundance.)

But what happens, Alcie and Jackson, if you are intentional in noticing God's goodness? I think all of the blooms around you become potential mustard seeds. If you are people who recognize the miracle of manna

in your own lives, you also become people who insist on that manna for your neighbors. A school project provokes a call to justice; a friend in need provokes a desire to offer your help and support; a privilege you notice afforded to you, becomes something you demand for others; conversations become fertile ground for adding to God's harvest.

And to me, the Kingdom of God, is your lives, our lives, entangled in the lives of those whom we will meet. And when I think about a garden, with the two of you planted in it, I am SO full of hope. Cause I know you've both got stubborn, persistent roots that aren't going anywhere. And I think about all those bulbs at UNC-C and Appalachian, and all the places you'll go in between who are gonna be planted in the garden next to you. And if they all get even as much of a mustard seed of your love, of your desire to make a better world, of your desire to serve neighbor, of your kindness, and joy, and creativity, what a world it's gonna be! Every moment for you, and indeed for each of us, is a moment to be present to someone else, to entangle love and justice into the ecosystems of this world.

And on those days when my heart grows weary and anxious about the complications and complexities of this world, I find hope in a vision of shade. Because I really do believe your mustard seeds can help grow branches of love and justice and creativity that will one day offer shelter from the stormy isms wreaking havoc on our world. And even better, your mustard seeds will keep coming back stronger year after year.

Alcie and Jackson, this is your world. Our hope, as your family of faith, is that you'll notice its beauty, AND, that you'll take the time to get all tangled up in it.

All Tangled and Such
Bob Stillerman
Third Sunday After Pentecost, Proper 6, 6/13/2021
Graduate Recognition
Mark 4:26-34



a spiritually
progressive
community
of faith

We also want to remind you that you've always got a home here. It turns out we've got a congregation full of invasive, annual mustard seeds, too! We promise to let you spread your wings to University City, and to Boone, and beyond, but we also hope you know you we're happy for you stay tangled up with us in any way you see fit.

Go with God's blessing, and in God's peace! Amen.