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SERMON TITLE: How Much Faith is Enough?

Walking as Disciples of Jesus Series

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 13:24-35

DATE: March 8, 2020

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also Isaiah 2:2-5. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org

Curiosity is rewarded by God. The more you give, the more you get. The more you ask, the more you receive. These are biblical principles.

The more you seek, the more you will find. The more you try to see, the more will be revealed to you. The more open your heart, the more you will be healed.

This is God's philosophy.

Curiosity with faith, commitment, and will is rewarded by God. Does that sound challenging? Think of it as the adventuresome curiosity of a child.

We are building curiosity about God by getting together each week during Lent to listen to stories from Scripture. As we seek, we will find. Together the process is enjoyable.

One way Jesus teaches is through parables. Parables are stories of ordinary life experiences that share spiritual insights. Their messages are often hidden and take work to comprehend. One of the most common phrases in Scripture is "*Jesus will you explain what you just said . . .*" People who may not understand at first but asked Jesus questions about it received his answer. Others who rejected Jesus or challenged Jesus are unable to understand. For them, parables are one big muddle. Jesus says the reason is that they are not open. They are not curious. They do not long to hear or see or seek like a child.

So let's try it. Let's read two short parables about what God's Kingdom is like. If we are part of that kingdom, we should want to understand it. READ Matthew 13:31-35

When you think of the Kingdom of God beginning with a seed and a small packet of yeast it tells you something about God's approach to the world. God sent Jesus to us. Look how Jesus has come to us. Jesus has not come into town like we envision the second coming—racing through the sky on a white horse—sort of like a rocket or a space shuttle reentering earth's atmosphere. The whole world sees it on the news!

But rather, Jesus comes to us slowly, in the natural order of things, everyday life, as a poor boy from a small town, little formal

education, bringing amazing enlightenment to those Old Testament prophecies which are the "mysteries of the kingdom."

It is like coming home, entering a dark room from the dark outside, turning on one lamp at a time, moving so that you are not overwhelmed, allowing your eyes to slowly adjust to the light.

It is like the mustard seed; small and common. What could come of it? Yet the planter plants it, waters it, and with sunshine it eventually pokes its head up and grows little by little, eventually to this huge tree.

I have a picture of a small tree in our front yard when we first built our house. Its trunk was probably an inch in circumference. Now that tree towers over the two-story house and its trunk measures over seven feet in circumference. But it took twenty-seven years to grow that large.

Jesus also shares that the Kingdom of God enters into this world as the world is. He said the world is like a field with both wheat and weeds; the good and the bad dwelling alongside each other. Our heavenly Father does not want to pull up the weeds now because it would disturb the wheat. That day will come. But for now, the wheat and weeds coexist. That's life as we know it, the good and the bad. But still through this process the wheat is able to grow and in the end, the most marvelous multiplication of the Kingdom of God will occur. The nourishing wheat will far outgrow the weeds and hopefully crowd out some of the weeds, for when judgment is delayed there's always hope. Paul writes,

"God desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." (1Timothy 2:4)

So we have this faith life that the Old Testament points to and which is slowly unfolding, working within the natural order of things and judgment is delayed. It unfolds into our Savior's life and beyond into the life of his disciples and ours. We, the ones who are curious, recognize its truth. We each do our own small part to spread the Kingdom until, as Isaiah predicts,

"In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's house will be the highest of all -- the most important place on earth. It will be raised above the other hills, and people from all over the world will stream there to worship" (Is 2:2).

The smallest seed to the highest place on earth. The weeds are overcome by the wheat.

Scripture tells us this is God's patience, to allow as many to enter the kingdom of God as possible. And they do enter, from all over the world. The Kingdom of God quietly grows.

You hear in the media of the decline of the church but that is ill-advised hype. Each generation has the picture of the field with both wheat and weeds which God is unwilling to disturb. Each generation of believers, in concert with God, plants their own tiny seeds with the hope and faith that our seeds too will grow into a big, fruitful, spreading ministry with giant branches for others. We are not to worry about outcomes, but to do our own small part, contributing our own gifts and talents to the Lord, leaving the results to Him.

The foundation of God's Kingdom begins in secret form. It can be overlooked. It is inconspicuous. It seems unimpressive and humble; small rather than spectacular. It is a mystery. We do not accept this easily. It requires waiting and nurture and faith.

And yet it is destined for greatness. Ordinary people doing things that God multiplies into an extraordinary outcome over time.

For example, let's imagine what happens when we let integrity permeate our lives, like yeast permeates the ingredients to make the bread. Integrity is being the same person in public and private. Our secret self when no one is looking is the same as our public self. Like yeast, authentic attitudes and actions permeate the people around us, then the environment, even the whole culture in which we live will notice. Just that one action makes a profound difference. People will notice and trust Christians more readily. Our good reputation will follow us.

Let's think of how Jesus did this. We learn that he showed up at the temple at age twelve asking questions about God. He traveled only in his own general area. He was not a military or political leader, not a formal leader of the Jewish faith. But he knew about God and was faithful to God, even unto death on the cross. After his death he was hardly mentioned except by those 500 people who acknowledged seeing him on earth afterwards.

Yet two hundred years later he was so well known that the Roman Empire adopts Christianity as their official religion. A thousand years later Europe erupts with a massive outflow of Christ-influenced literature, art, music, and architecture until Europe's very foundation was largely formed by Christian faith. Now, Jesus' birth marks our calendar.

Jesus said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman uses in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough."

John Ortberg points out that although Jesus never wrote a book, his call to love God with all your mind would later give rise to the world of education. Oxford and Cambridge were started by scholars licensed by the pope. Oxford's motto is from Psalm 27:1, "The Lord is my light." They were called *universities* to reflect the idea that God created all things.

Harvard was established six years after the settlers landed in Massachusetts with these words in the student handbook: "Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God

and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life, and therefore to lay Christ . . . as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning."¹ Yale, and virtually the entire Western system of education, was started by people who took to heart to teach others to follow Jesus' commandments.²

"Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough."

It is a mystery, but think of the emergence of hospitals with names like Methodist Healthcare System, Presbyterian Hospital, Baptist Medical Center, St. Luke's, St. Joseph's, St. Mark's. Jesus healed many people, and then told his followers, *you will do more than me*. Only after Christianity was endorsed in the Roman Empire were civilian hospitals built. Later, in the 4th century the "second medical revolution" occurred with the first Christian hospital founded by Basil, the Bishop of Caesarea in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey.³

In Greece, St. Basil is also the priest who is associated with Santa Claus because he would bring gifts to children every year at Christmastime.⁴

How did Jesus/Christianity come to influence all these parts of the world? Through the faith of ordinary believers who wondered what small thing they might do as an expression of their love for Christ. How much faith is enough?

"Truly I tell you," Jesus said, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (Mt. 17:20).

The more you ask, the more you receive. But if you do not ask, if you are not curious about spiritual things, you will not receive them. How are you doing at asking? How are you doing at acting?

AMEN

¹ John Ortberg, *Who is this Man? The Unpredictable Impact of the Inescapable Jesus*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 66.

² *Ibid.*, 15.

³ "History of Hospitals," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_hospitals, accessed March 4, 2020.

⁴ "Basil of Caesarea," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basil_of_Caesarea, accessed March 4, 2020.