

Christ Church Clifton Sermon Notes & Questions



Series: Autumn 2017
Passage: Matt 13:31-34 Mustard seed and yeast
Preacher: Janet Lee **Date of Sermon:** October 29th 2017

Importance of influencers on Instagram today, people who act as cultural ambassadors. So what has this to do with us? We are ambassadors for Christ? So how can we bring God's kingdom? Have influence in the world? We are called to be a people who reproduce the life of Jesus, by connecting, growing and influencing, connecting with God and one another, growing by restoring identity and releasing purpose and influence, empowering people and transforming culture. This present series is looking at how we can grow and be a positive influence for good, for God. To help play our part, in bringing God's kingdom, the place where God reigns, is in charge, reign of God as seen in the person of Jesus amongst men and women. I will be looking at theme growth and influence. Look at these 2 parables from Matt13, both told by Jesus who said "The kingdom of God is like this..." (Matt 13v31-34)

Quick recap of 2 parables, a parable is a story told to illustrate a spiritual or moral or ethical truth, usually a simple story told from daily life, using everyday illustrations. Today's 2 parable, have one parable with a man, the second with a woman, one outside in a field, one inside in a kitchen. When Jesus told it 2000 years ago those were the typical roles and places the people found themselves in, unlikely to be many farmers today! A reminder, of everyday life, how can we work out our faith?

'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.'

Mustard seeds were smallest seeds in ancient Palestine, a fully grown bush could reach 8-12' high, attract wild birds to eat little black seeds of the tree. He planted it in his own field, his own place, not someone else's. What is your field? The man simply planted the seed and waited, but probably tilled the soil first, watered it and waited till it grew. The man prepared the environment, tilled the ground, watered it and waited. Our own proverbs "from little acorns, mighty oaks grow" possibly 14th century English proverb, from small beginnings, can get enormous results. Small beginnings can lead to great results. Something very small can have enormous results.

³³ *He told them still another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about thirty kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough.'*

Do you make bread at home? An example from inside the home, a woman baking, do you enjoy bread week on GBBO? Modern bread makers not the same as old fashioned, kneading of the dough, take out your frustrations on the dough. It is hard work, note! Again from something small and insignificant a bit of leaven or yeast, permeates the whole batch of flour and eventually enough bread is baked for over 100 people if use 30 kg of flour. You cannot see the yeast at work but it is working, as yeast feeds on sugars in flour, it gives off CO₂ and the bread tastes wonderful, nothing like fresh bread! The woman had to work hard, kneading the dough, hard work, no instant results. Again, something small can have very enormous results.

What do these 2 parables teach us?

1. Wherever you find yourself, farm or kitchen, man or woman, God can use us to help grow his kingdom
2. It takes time! A lot of waiting, months and months between planting and harvesting.
3. The growth is hidden, we cannot see it, happens underground in the soil as root system grows, or inside the dough as yeast work is hidden from sight.

1. Wherever you find yourself, earlier I asked "what is your field? For 12 years I spent on school gate, hours and hours of my life talking to other parents and carers, what influence did that have? Seasons change, your field may have changed it may be the workplace where you spend most time. As we go through life the field changes from school, to university/college, to workplace, home, in Bristol or overseas, then maybe retirement, may be in supported housing, what is your field? On local mission audit we recently asked people what charities they supported, I was pleased to see someone had written the Scouts, someone PTA, school governor they had realised local mission took them naturally to those places. What is your field at the moment? What could you do there?

2. It takes time. Plants take a long time to germinate from seed, to grow, even before they come above ground, then ages to grow, and ages to produce fruit etc. A tall hardwood tree in a rainforest can take 100 years to grow. All gardeners know it takes a

long time cannot get instant results in gardens, it takes time. Bread making takes time, have to wait hours for bread to rise, leave dough covered in an airing cupboard overnight, no instant results, even with a bread maker. There is a tendency as a Christian to want to see instant results in growth, instant results from a charity initiative, instant results from a new spiritual discipline, but it takes time to permeate, to work to come to fruition. In 21st century we are a hurried rushed people, time-poor, as seen in rise of ready to cook meals. Children are growing every day but you don't spot it till, suddenly a year later, someone says How have you grown! God can work slowly, changing our lives and the lives of others, can't spot difference after just one day.. Recent prayer letter from Jock and Katy Hughes over 30 years career spent in remote Aru Island Indonesia, writing Dobel as a language, and then translating scriptures, verse by verse. An extract from her latest prayer letter,

In early May, Jock and the Dobel team made a trip to three Dobel-speaking villages. The goals for this trip were: to distribute Luke's Gospel and a booklet containing "12 letters from the New Testament" to three Dobel villages; to train church leaders to read the Dobel Scriptures aloud, to pray in Dobel, and encourage them to use Dobel for ministry wherever possible; to model good practice to the Dobel team, so that they could do this on their own in the future. Praying in their own language (rather than the national language) was a new experience for many, and some were moved to tears.

Next week Andy and Emma Murray are coming, Emma started Bristol NW foodbank when they came to Bristol over 7 years. Look at growth of that ministry over 7 years. It takes time. Wait, be patient, God is at work. It takes time.

3.The growth is hidden.

We cannot always see the growth, so often it is hidden. In case of plants it is underground. There is often an extensive root system hidden cannot see it from the surface. Yeast permeates through whole flour, cannot see it at work, leavening, causing CO₂ which causes the bread to rise. Spiritual growth is not perceptible, small incremental steps, only after years look at someone, they have changed. Some things are hidden from us, we do not know the results of our endless conversations at school gate, we do not know what effect being known as a Christian had in our office, people were watching us, secretly, looking at us, and the effect is hidden. We do not know the effect of sharing our lives and faith with others, sometimes we will never see what happened. I taught for 11 years in FE college, no idea what happened to my students, occasionally meet them again. In heaven at end of time all will be revealed, I am looking forward to finding out, did those prayers I prayed the words I said, the way I lived and worked, have any effect on others around.

So parables of mustard seed and yeast teach us, work wherever we found ourselves, give it time, and growth of kingdom is also hidden from our sight, not always obvious. Final word from St Paul in 1 Cor 3:6,7. *1 Cor 3⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.* God is the one who makes our seeds grow. Great results can come from small beginnings.

⁸ *The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour.*
⁹ *For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.* Our reward will be treasure in heaven not the £100s or thousands of £ influencers are paid on Instagram or Snapchat. We are co-workers, we are God's field.

The Kingdom of God is growing, everywhere, it is growing slowly and it is hidden. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, like yeast. So let's consider, what is your "field" at the moment? Are you patient, waiting for results? Are you patient, knowing growth is hidden from our sight?

Questions for study:

Optional starter Who are the current influencers in your life ?

1. What is a parable and why did Jesus use them? Count how many parables are in Matt 13.
2. Read Matt 13:31-34, then keep silence for 5mins and share any insight you each have.
3. Share examples of where small seeds have had great results.
4. What is your field ? In the past? Where has God placed you now?
5. It takes time! Why does it take so long to see God's kingdom at work?
6. How can we prevent ourselves getting impatient for instant results?
7. The growth is hidden, again think of examples where we didn't see what was happening, or the effect of something?
8. How do you keep going when there are no obvious visible results?
9. Read 1Cor 3:6,7 and discuss, who does the actual growing? What is our particular role?

Pray! For each other, for our mission partners, why not send an encouragement to them?