

**Last week I spoke about the historical inaccuracies of Mark's Gospel...  
Well...he's done it again!**

**Scholars generally believe that the evangelist who wrote the Gospel of Mark,  
shall I say, domesticated this famous Mustard Seed Parable.  
In other words, he really did write what Jesus said!  
He did not retain the radical nature of his teaching!**

**A mustard seed is not: a) the smallest of seeds and b) does not grow into the greatest of all  
shrubs! In Luke and Mathew's Gospel this parable is also told,  
but in those writings, the authors say that the Mustard Seed grows into tree...  
which it never does!**

**The mustard plant is an ordinary, weedy, invasive, rather small bush.  
The ancient Jews were actually forbidden to plant it in their fields or gardens  
because it overtakes any area it is able to gain a foothold in.  
It is tenacious and impossible to eradicate once it starts...**

**While this little shrub could probably be described as a scrappy and determined weed,  
majestic and mighty it is not!**

**So of course, as always...what is going on here?  
Is the Kingdom of God really more like an annoying, scrappy, invasive weed  
than an impressive, stately 'greatest of all shrubs'????**

**As always knowing some of the historical context of our Scripture stories  
is very enlightening....**

**Scholars will tell you that the Kingdom of Israel reached its pinnacle of majesty, might and  
influence under the reigns of King David and King Solomon.**

**The nation was powerful, the great temple was built, the people were free, and at peace.**

**But...David reigned 1000 years before Jesus and King Solomon built the Temple 961 years before Jesus! Think about it...the United States isn't even 300 years old yet!**

**So their 'golden years' were long gone...**

**In 721 BCE, the Assyrians conquer the Northern section of Israel and in 587 the Babylonians conquer the Southern sections and the once great nation of Israel was reduced to a conquered conglomeration of slaves...**

**So it's easy to imagine why the Jews yearned for a return to their former glory... who could blame them?!**

**As a people, their image of the Kingdom of God were the great Cedars of Lebanon**

**The Cedars could be compared to the giant redwoods of California....**

**They are the tallest trees in the forest, often times growing to 200-300 feet!**

**They could provide shelter for all kinds of animals and birds...**

**In the minds of the ancient Jews...**

**the Cedars were the perfect image of strength, power, and majestic presence...**

**So for Jesus to come forth and compare the Kingdom of God not to the Great Cedar of Lebanon but to a scrappy, weedy bush is really unthinkable....**

**the people just could not wrap their heads around that!**

**Imagine someone advising Americans that being small and scrappy is better than being the most powerful nation on Earth....**

**do you think any red-blooded American is going to say: Yeah!**

**The ancient Jews refused Jesus' image of God's kingdom...  
so... Scholars say, to make the mustard seed more acceptable to the people,  
all 3 evangelists make the mustard seed, as an image for the Kingdom of God, something  
that it is not...they said would grow really, really, really big...**

**Even back then people's need for power and status would get in the way  
of Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom of God...  
Even today, any time we can feed our need to be right, to be in power, to be looked upon  
as great and mighty...we are so all over it!**

**The problem is, that is not the way of Jesus...  
He wasn't interested in worldly power...  
He wasn't interested in status, position, power and might...**

**He was interested in changing people's minds and hearts about his Daddy, his Abba...  
He was interested in helping people understand that Love, compassion, mercy and  
forgiveness belongs to everyone and also to no one...**

**That kind of message, Jesus' kind of message actually doesn't draw a large following...**

**It's too soft...too small...it doesn't feel powerful ...  
it doesn't make us feel better than others because it actually levels  
the field of God's love and mercy...  
and that's hard for most, if not all of us...**

**Jesus taught that God's forgiveness and love is already given:  
nothing to earn, nothing to work for.  
Lots of people don't like that...they don't want him or her in heaven...  
Lots of people want to be rewarded for all of their service and generosity...  
at least with the promise of heaven...**

**Lots of people want to feel special and right...**

**Lots of people want to feel better than *someone...any one...***

**some people want to feel better than everyone...**

**The trouble is, according to Jesus, Kingdom of God is for everyone...is already in everyone....and to make matters worse, in some people's view:**

**it will not make you more powerful,**

**you will not have status and prestige...**

**people probably won't ooohhhh and ahhhh about how holy and wonderful you are...**

**It won't make you the biggest guy or gal on the block**

**It won't make us the most powerful nation on the planet**

**It won't make you the largest tree in the forest,**

**but ...**

**the Presence of the Holy inside you cannot be eradicated or eliminated...**

**it is always there: scrappy and persistent...**

**But it won't be the 'wow! look at me!' kind of Presence...**

**The Presence of the Kingdom of God speaks in that still small voice**

**that you must be listening for...**

**It speaks in the sound of silence that is better perceived with our hearts**

**rather than in our minds...**

**The Presence of the Kingdom of God isn't guaranteed by the largest Cathedral  
or the fanciest or shiniest of Holy places...**

**The Presence of the Holy is found in the quiet whispers of Gratitude  
and Love showing up in our ordinary, everyday, nothing special lives.**

**The Presence of the Kingdom of God is made visible in acts of  
kindness, compassion and service...**

**The Presence of the Kingdom of God includes all of God's creation...**

**and that includes you and me...**

**And for that we can only breathe a sigh of relief and say, thank you! amen.**