

If a bird spotted a mustard seed on the ground, it would not wait for that seed to grow into a large plant so it could make a nest in its shade. It would quickly grab that seed with its mouth and devour it.

This is what the birds do, says Jesus in another parable, to the seed that falls along the path. Although I doubt very much that the sower was sowing mustard seeds. They're tiny. So tiny, in fact, that a bird may not even spot it. Or if he does, he may ignore it and find something bigger and better to eat.

This is how it is with the kingdom of God. It is, says Jesus, like a tiny mustard seed. The kingdom of God, like a mustard seed, is not going to grab anyone's attention. So small is it that people do not even see it. And even if they do, so unimpressive is it that they are inclined to ignore it.

First Corinthians chapter one is in full agreement. *"The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing."* So is Luke 7: *"The Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized."* And so is Hebrews 10 which tells us that even early on Christians were neglecting to gather in the Lord's House around the Lord's Table.

The Gospel of the kingdom of God is the word of the cross, baptism, and communion. The very things, as these Scripture texts tell us, which are neglected, ignored, and despised. The poor mustard seed. People near and far turn up their noses at it.

And yet this tiny seed is the only thing in which the power of God to save is at work. First Corinthians again: *"The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God!"* The Pharisees and lawyers rejected Holy Baptism, but the Apostle Peter declares to us that *"baptism now saves you."* And though many have, for 2,000 years, been neglecting the Lord's Supper, Jesus tells us that this meal of His body and blood forgives our sins. So, although the world by and large is unimpressed by the preaching of Christ Crucified and His Sacraments, there are some who see the mustard seed for what it is.

Now maybe these are not so greatly impressed by it that they jump up and down. Yet this tiny seed of the Gospel has made quite the impression upon them. Because look, here you are once again gathering around the Gospel of the kingdom – the mustard seed. You are not despising it, ignoring it, or simply neglecting it.

And I have to confess that I do not know why and how this is. We learn this from the first parable in our Gospel reading. The man scatters seed on the ground. He sleeps and he rises night and day, and the seed grows, yet he does not know how.

It is not man-power; it's God-power. The Word of the Lord grows, not because of me or you, but because of God alone. And yet He uses people to scatter the seed and to water it. And He brings that seed into your life so that you know and believe that the seed, the word of the cross, implanted in you, *"is able to save your soul."*

Now this tiny seed, says Jesus, “*grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.*” Are you and I not these birds of which He speaks? It does not happen right away. But as you are raised up in the church, you learn over time that this is where you come. You come for shade, for rest. You make your nest here so that your family is raised in the church, and their families after them. This is what Jesus wants.

But there’s something about birds. They make a mess. Go look outside at the nest above the basement doors. Unless someone cleaned it up, there is a ton of bird poop on the cement down below. It’s what birds do. It’s what we do. When we all come together to nest in the shade of the mustard seed plant, we are going to ruffle each other’s feathers. We make a mess of our own lives, and we make messes in the lives of others. And, now and then, a bird takes offense and leaves the nest. Sometimes a bird that does this will return to the nest. But quite often there is no coming back.

This is not what Jesus wants for those who belong to Him. The plant that grows from the mustard seed is built upon the foundation of the word of the cross. That word is the word of forgiveness. If we do not forgive each other here in the nest, then how are we any different from the world, from those who are perishing? For is it not true that the refusal to forgive and reconcile is to regard the word of the cross as foolishness? Yet only those who are perishing do that.

So, stay in the nest. We should not be so proud and full of ourselves that our feathers easily become ruffled. For consider the truth that although we have offended God by our grievous sins, yet He forgives us. In fact, when Jesus says that the mustard plant puts out large branches, are these branches not the wood of His cross? And so the mustard seed plant is covered with blood, Jesus’ blood. And you and I, and all who come here for shade, are covered in that blood.

This is why there is shade for us. We live in the shelter of God’s grace. We live in His mercy, not His anger. There is no sin, no matter how grievous, that He refuses to forgive. And your messes, all of them, are daily washed away in the water of your baptism. And so we will forgive each other. We will sin against each other, for we are sinful. But we forgive because God forgives us.

This is why God planted the mustard seed. It is why He caused it to grow and put out large branches. It’s for your forgiveness. It’s for you to come and hear the word of the cross; to hear that God forgives you. And He does, my friend. His feathers never become ruffled. Your God has forgiven you. And so, we birds who live here in the nest pray, “Lord, You have forgiven me. Help me, therefore, to forgive others.” Amen.