
I Have Decided to Follow Jesus

A sermon by Canon Lauren Holder
Proper 6 – Year B

When I first considered the juxtaposition of our gospel text with the story of David being anointed as king, I started asking myself, who are the mustard seeds among us? You see, David was a mustard seed. When Samuel asked David's father to round up all his sons and present them, he didn't even bother bringing David in from the fields. David was the youngest. Likely the smallest. Perhaps the least skilled or the least mature. There was no chance Samuel was coming to select David. Better to leave him tending the sheep.

But no! Samuel passed up every other seemingly ideal candidate for the job, listening to God's instruction. After considering no less than seven sons, he came to the end of the line, probably a little concerned that no king was to be found, but asked—do you not have any more sons? And only then is David even acknowledged and then invited to be present.

And lo and behold, God chooses David. And chooses him for his heart. If you know anything about David, you know his heart wasn't perfect. No earthly king's heart is. But you also know that David drew near to God and talked to God and repented to God when his heart failed God.

So I'm still asking myself, who are the mustard seeds among us?

Who are the leaders we might ignore, pass over, neglect, assuming them to be unworthy?

Who doesn't seem to fit the job description of our minds, but instead fits God's search for a good heart?

Who is too young? Too old? Too disabled? Too slow? Too shy? Too loud spoken? Too unrefined? Too poor? Too unknown? Too colorful? Too boring?

If we are honest with ourselves, we all have some sort of prejudice that causes us to look past certain people as if they do not even exist. I know I do—and yet it's hard to know when I do because we don't always notice what we don't notice. Because like David, even if we have the best of intentions, our hearts are bound to fail God on occasion. Will we, like David, draw close to God so that we can see our sin and ask forgiveness?

Who are the mustard seeds among us?

But Jesus didn't tell these parables (and there are two of them) to bring up David. Jesus told these parables to talk about the kingdom of God. And so we need to talk about the kingdom of God this morning, too.

The first parable reminds us that we are not in control, and the kingdom of God is not all about us or about what we can do or what we can bring about in this world. Someone scatters seed, goes to sleep and wakes, watches the seed grow without understanding why. In fact, the Greek word used describes these crops as growing *automatically*. The earth produces of itself. I find this illustration to be both reassuring and humbling. Reassuring because at times I feel completely overwhelmed by the needs of our world. I feel too small (like a mustard seed!) to make a difference. This parable reminds

me that the kingdom of God will come to fruition automatically. The kingdom of God will produce of itself. God's bigness is much bigger than my smallness. But it's a parable of humility too because I need constant reminders that I do nothing apart from God. That self-reliance is a myth. That my efforts to have it all together are more about my vanity than about pointing to God's activity in the world. And so daily we pray: thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. We still have a role to play in this story, but it's not the lead role.

And I imagine that is true in part because the kingdom of God is seemingly so counterintuitive, so counter-cultural, so revolutionary, that it's beyond anything anyone but God would dream up. When Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a mustard seed, he's being funny and subversive. He calls the mustard plant the "greatest of all shrubs" which is like saying "the most resounding of all harmonicas" or "the most eloquent of all toddlers." And then, because Jesus has a knack for turning things upside-down—for comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comforted—for saying things like, "You've heard it said an eye for an eye, but I say love your enemies"—this same Jesus chooses a plant as ubiquitous as kudzu in Georgia. Not the kind of plant you'd choose to cultivate. And in explaining why the mustard shrub is so great and kingdom-like, he praises it for giving birds of the air a place to nest. Anyone who has watched Wizard of Oz knows that birds are not what you want near your crops. It's why we have scarecrows! Yet Jesus compares the kingdom of God to an unwanted plant providing shelter to unwanted birds. If that doesn't preach this week, I don't know what will.

So friends. Fellow mustard seeds. Do not be discouraged, but pray fervently that God's kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. And then don't be surprised when it looks nothing like powers of this world. Be like Samuel—searching for God's anointed in unlikely people. Be like David, drawing close to God and asking forgiveness when your good heart falls short. And be like Jesus, upsetting the status quo with love again and again and again. Because Jesus doesn't come as justice incarnate or fairness incarnate, but LOVE incarnate. And I have decided to follow Jesus.

Amen.