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Seeds

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We're in a series called "Weeds, Seeds, and Shiny Things." The intention of this series is to understand how the particular stories of our lives are part of the pervasive story of God's love and grace for us. Our stories and God's story are not disconnected. They are constantly moving together in the context of what we call the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, used interchangeably. Two weeks ago, Pastor Paul Dean talked about the Kingdom of God, the power of forgiveness, and how God calls us to be "stretchy" in our relationships as we chart a new course together. Last week Pastor Paul asked us to consider looking inward and how even the weeds have a purpose in the fertile fields of God's Kingdom. Today I want to talk about seeds - the seeds of the Kingdom of God, the often overlooked and misunderstood moments that point to what God is up to in the world. But what exactly is the Kingdom of God? What is the Kingdom of Heaven? What do we mean when we use that language? Where is it? How does it manifest itself? How can we possibly describe it?

In his book *Wishful Thinking*, Frederick Buechner suggests that *"The Kingdom of heaven is more an experience than a place. It's not really about a destination on some cosmic map, a place we go when we die. Rather, the Kingdom of God is an experience, like how you feel and know in your bones when you glimpse the thing. It's what gives us life and more life. More life here, now, while we're still living."* The 'thing,' of course, is really several 'things' like the Presence of God, the Movement of the Spirit, a brush with 'the Holy' like when your first grader brings home and asks you to put his artwork on the fridge; like when your like granddaughter looks at you and says she loves you; like when you hear that old song you used to sing in church, and it brings you to tears; like

when you open your bible, and the passage you're reading is just when you need in that moment. If Buechner is right, and I know he is, then the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, is like one big 'Aha!' God moment!

To be clear, the Kingdom of God IS NOT a great cup of coffee. It's NOT a sold sign on the house. It's NOT an acceptance letter from the "University of Wherever." But if we have eyes to see and ears to hear, these things certainly can and do point us toward the Kingdom of God. These things certainly can show us how God works in the simple, mundane, usually very ordinary places in our lives. A helpful way for me to think about it is to say that the Kingdom of God is like something 'this-worldly' that points us to something 'other-worldly.'

Jesus wanted his followers to be present with the emerging Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven. He didn't want them to miss it. Jesus had a way of making intangibles really tangible for His students. "The kingdom of God is like this..." he said. "The kingdom of heaven is like those things..." he said. The kingdom of heaven is like leaven in the dough. The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. The kingdom of heaven is like a wedding feast. In Matthew 13:31-32, Jesus says, *"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown, it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."* The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

The intention is not to trivialize the Kingdom of God or shrink the immensity of God's amazing truth. But it seems to me that Jesus often provided ordinary language to make extraordinary things come to life for his followers. So how do we not miss the kingdom of God emerging and being revealed all around us? If the kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard

seed, how do we not miss it? Two spiritual practices can be helpful.

First, the spiritual practice of Awareness. I want to take you back to another gem from theologian, pastor, and writer, Frederick Buechner, who challenges us with powerful words of invitation in his book, *Now and Then: A Memoir of Vocation*. Buechner writes, *"Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis, all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace."*

Frederick Buecher understands that the Kingdom of God is a part of our lives, like tiny seeds. You can almost hear it. You can almost touch it. You can almost breathe its aroma; you can almost see it! The question is, though, are you aware of it? Are you training yourself to recognize the little seeds of the kingdom when the kingdom comes close?

So, maybe the Kingdom of God emerges when you're singing a powerful song in worship, and you feel the tears welling up, and then there's that mysterious lump in your throat. Maybe you're reading a passage of scripture, and it's just what you need at that very moment! It's like experiencing some anxiety about something going on in your life and having just enough breath to pray, "Lord, help!" and suddenly you feel that peace that passes all understanding.

Awareness grows when we actively connect the stories of God's love with the daily stories of our lives. But it takes some practice. Awareness begins to grow like this: at some point, you're not just seeing a newborn baby but the Lord of all creation who created that baby. At some point, you're not just helping someone who needs help, but you're seeing the physical presence of Jesus Christ in that person, so you're serving Christ. At some point, we're celebrating communion together, and you're no

longer holding a tiny wafer between your thumb and index finger or a cup of wine in your hand, but you're holding in your hands and tasting on your lips what your heart and mind can't fully comprehend – the love and grace of God in bread and wine.

Let's be clear: the newborn baby isn't the kingdom of God. Your friend in need isn't the kingdom of God. The communion wafer that feels and tastes like Styrofoam isn't the kingdom of God. But all of these things – if we have eyes to see and ears to hear, if we're practicing Awareness, will point us toward the Kingdom of God emerging right here and now. So, my challenge for you in the days of this week is to connect as much of your daily experience with the expectation that the Kingdom of God is here, now, among us, emerging around us everywhere.

When we begin to do that, we discover the power of the second spiritual practice. Gratitude. I know, right? We come back to gratitude. It all comes back to gratitude, giving thanks to God for everything. When we're aware of and actively looking for all of the ways the tiniest seeds of the Kingdom of God are emerging, we'll naturally express gratitude for all that God is doing among us. Gratitude for life, health, and breath. Gratitude for bike rides with loved ones, for driver's licenses, for corn on the cob, and strawberries and shortcakes! Gratitude for loved ones who remind us that we are loved and treasured. Gratitude for kisses and hugs from kids and grandkids, and great grandkids. Gratitude for reminders of God's faithfulness, for all that God has done and is doing! Gratitude for this place, for this moment, for music and prayer. Gratitude for life, and health, and breath.

The tiny seeds of God's kingdom are scattered throughout our lives. Our stories planted in the soil of God's story within us is growing into something extraordinary. Are you aware of that? Are you grateful for that?