

## **“If You Build It...”**

October 1, 2017

*Risk-Taking Mission and Service* series – World Communion Sunday

“If you build it, they will come...” Maybe you remember back in 1989 when the film “Field of Dreams” captured a lot of hearts and that phrase became popular. The film talked about building a baseball field, but we’re talking about building the Kingdom of God.

It seems fitting to conclude our focus on risk-taking mission and service this way because we’re not really done. Hearing from some of our local missions and ministries was a good start, but the building part isn’t just about what God is doing. Are we willing to say, “God, if you build it, we will help”? It’s also about what we’re willing to invest. We’ll get to the investment part in a minute.

Remember that risk-taking mission and service is “all that we do to make a positive difference in the lives of others for the purposes of Christ, whether or not they will ever be part of the community of faith.” Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, so it might seem like we’re not concerned about whether or not folks find a community of faith.

I hope we are concerned and want to grow, and there’s a word for us about big growth from small things. There’s the mystery of how a tree grows from a single, tiny seed. There’s the fascinating fact that just a bit of leaven can change a big lump of dough. Look at how the yeast is working with the sugar, salt, and water to grow.

But Jesus is also hinting that the way the Kingdom of God grows isn’t always what we expect. In reality, it’s probably not what we expect. Maybe we expect systematic growth and an orderly way that God works, but these images don’t convey that! Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God not with regal, royal, or special images, but with ordinary things - earthy things - like seeds and leaven!

And how telling that both the seed and the leaven are invasive and unpredictable. Jesus describes the Kingdom not in a “top-down” way as the empire of his time was, but as something that comes up from the ground - organic and upside-down from what we might expect - and not always easy to see or anticipate.

Perhaps there’s a word for us about seeing the Kingdom of God all around us - and knowing that when Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom is near, he means it! There are signs of the Kingdom of God every day! And just when we think we’ve figured out how God will move and work - in whom God will move and work - we’re surprised.

I’ll confess that I’ve been surprised before when I had my own thoughts about God could work (and should work!) Perhaps we struggle to believe that God could

possibly work through certain people or in certain circumstances, but time and again, God does, and we're surprised.

The Kingdom of God isn't "far off" and only in the eternal realm. Jesus says it's here and now, too. It's as near and real as our small acts that make a difference. It's as near and real as the way we live the faith we claim. It's as near and real as one life that's changed because of your witness. It's as near and real in what we say and do for the sake of Jesus as it was when Jesus healed, taught, ate with those who weren't popular or well-liked, spent time with the ones who were on the outside, cared for the poor, talked to those who had no power, and helped them know without a doubt that God loved them.

Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is almost unassuming, almost too small to be seen. But it's always there with a power that cannot be denied. Even though Israel considered itself a strong, cedar tree and powerful among nations, Jesus offers the image of a seed – a not-so-glorious field plant that spreads like a weed. The seed became a tree for many birds to find shelter and protection in, and yet some would've been tempted to weed it out.

And leaven was an interesting image for Jesus to use. Leaven isn't really yeast as we think of it today in a small packet, but rather a piece of old bread used to work into new dough to make it rise. Normally, leaven was a symbol of something unclean or corrupt. Jesus says that the woman hides the leaven in about 50 pounds of flour - enough bread for a wedding feast!

I remember one time when I was trying to make bread for a 4-H project, and I came out of the kitchen looking like "swamp thing" with dough hanging off my hands. My dad had to tell me that sometimes you just have to keep adding flour until the dough gets to be the right consistency (even if you've tried to follow the recipe!). Even a small amount of leaven will change the whole batch!

Jesus' purpose wasn't simply to tell us about eternal life, but to tell us that the Kingdom of Heaven is here and now and call us to build it with God's help and power. Yet it's so easy for us to underestimate God's power to build and our gifts and call to respond. It's so easy to assume that God's work is orderly and predictable - until we realize that it's not! God is always pushing the boundaries that we create or the way we do things. God is always challenging what we seem so certain about.

Perhaps we only need to think of a time when a small act changed a situation for us - when someone cared enough to talk, when we got a card in the mail, the encouragement someone offered, a kind gesture or act, a prayer offered in faith that said just the right thing, a moment or memory that reminds us of God's presence and faithfulness. I had that experience just last week at one of our meetings when someone

prayed for my family and said just the right thing. The Kingdom of God is like that, Jesus says, the small thing that matters and changes things for good.

Today we celebrate World Communion Sunday. Consider that Christian denominations around the world are coming to the Lord's Table. It's a reminder of our unity in Christ, and drives home the words we say: "Make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world..."

Do you see how those circles widen? My relationship with Christ, then others, and then the whole world! In our tradition, we receive a special offering to help students realize the dream of education through the gift of scholarships. All around we have the power to invest in what God is doing.

**HAND OUT ENVELOPES: 9:00 Ushers, 11:00 a.m. Jean, Sheryl, & June**

As we seek to be partners with God in building the Kingdom here and now, we're invited to invest something. Today you'll receive a Kingdom assignment. Each of us will receive an envelope with a \$5.00 bill, instructions, and a small business card. We're entrusted with this gift in the hope that we'll give it away as an investment in building the Kingdom of God by using our gifts to grow this money to benefit people in some way and make the world a better place.

Don't worry, we've included ideas, but we hope that you'll be creative. You can take a picture or a video of what you do. The church business card is a way for us to share that we're doing this as a part of this congregation. It's a witness to the world.

You'll see a few questions for reflection on one side on the instruction sheet, and my hope is that some of us will share about this assignment next month on November 19. May God help us as we seek first the Kingdom of God and seek to build it where we are with the gifts we have.

As we prepare to come to the table of the Lord, please join me in prayer...

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION**