

**Matthew 13:24-35**

<sup>24</sup>Jesus put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in their field; <sup>25</sup>but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. <sup>26</sup>So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. <sup>27</sup>And the slaves of the householder came and said, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ <sup>28</sup>The master answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ <sup>29</sup>But the master replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup>Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

<sup>31</sup>He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in their field; <sup>32</sup>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.” <sup>33</sup>He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.” <sup>34</sup>Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing. <sup>35</sup>This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: “I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world.”

For Reflection

The opposite of love is not hate, it is indifference.

-David Anderson Hooker

It feels like I have been gone for a long time, though it has just been a week. Last weekend I had the honor of participating in an Alternatives to Violence Project Workshop in one of our prisons. That is some beautiful and hard work. There will be another workshop in August - if any of you think you might be interested in spending three days inside the prison - let me know!

And then on Monday I left for Pastor's Week at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, where we spent a week considering hierarchy, race, and loving our neighbors in difficult times. And much of my sermon today will come from presentations I heard from a Notre Dame professor Dr. David Anderson Hooker.

It is so good to be back home and here with my community.

### **Let's Pray Together**

*God of love and life, we come before you now....*

Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing.

In and through his teachings, in and through his parables, Jesus is doing narrative work. He is trying to reshape the narrative that people were living by in the first century. They have a narrative of their past - a story that tells them, what does it mean to be "God's people" - a narrative that they have shaped their lives around and that gives their lives meaning. There is a narrative they are living by that instructs them as to what it means for them to be Jewish; what it means for them to be good Jews living under Empire, under the occupation of Rome.

And so Jesus is doing narrative work; taking that same material and inviting them to look at it with a different interpretive lens. He does this throughout the Sermon on the Mount when he is continually saying, "you have heard that it was said, but now I say to you..." And he does

it throughout the gospels in parables. In and through these parables Jesus says, “you thought you knew what was critically important, but let me tell you a story about what is truly important to God.” He is continually inviting his audience, and us, to reshape the narratives that have formed us.

Most of us tend to, “I’ll believe it when I see it.” But in and through his teachings, in and through these parables, Jesus is saying, “you’ll start to see it once you believe it.” When you believe the Spirit of God is at work in the world, you will start to see it in small ways. When you believe the Spirit of God is moving in your life, you will start to find places where that is true. When you stop seeing yourself as a victim of circumstance and instead see your power as a change agent, you will begin to recognize the power you have. You believe you are too small and powerless, but look at this seed, it produces this tree that brings life to so many. You’ll start to see it once you believe it.

As I have said many times before, a belief is simply living as if something were true. Or, as David Anderson Hooker put it to us this week, the only thing that makes something true is when we organize our lives around it. The only thing that makes something true is when we organize our lives around it.

And the narrative that Jesus is telling is that of a shared future; Jesus is always trying to move us to a view of a shared future; from a view of our individuals lives and our individual salvation being the only thing that really matters, to a view of a shared future – where our lives and our salvation is dependent upon one another. Where we believe it is all wrapped-up together. Where we concern ourselves with helping shape a world where all are able to flourish.

I surprisingly learned a bit about biology and animal behavior this week at my pastor's conference. I learned a bit about training elephants. Elephants can be trained to participate in their own demise and capture. That when Elephants are being trained - and this is why there has been enough outrage to get Ringling Brothers to phase out their elephant act - in training elephants for the circus or other such shows, they would take a young elephant and put a chain or cuff around one leg and then stake the chain into the ground. In doing so, a young elephant eventually comes to believe that this is all the further they can go, just the length of that chain. When that time comes, you can remove the chain, and the elephant won't run off or go any further than the distance of that chain. They have come to believe in this reality - this is all the further they can go.

It is the same with fleas. If you take fleas and put them in a jar they can easily jump out - a flea can jump about 7-8 inches high. But if you put the lid on the jar, eventually, after hitting up against the lid enough, they will only jump as high as the jar allows. So much so that if they are in a jar with little holes where they can stay alive and have little flea offspring, the flea offspring will never learn the true height they can jump - they'll just learn to jump the height of their container. That is their new reality, despite what their abilities are.

As I mentioned, our featured speaker was David Anderson Hooker who teaches International Peacemaking at Notre Dame. He has a PhD, a J.D. and a Masters of Divinity. But apparently before all those things he also studied biology somewhere along the way, because he told us about a summer research project he did with sea slugs. Sea slugs are naturally attracted to light, so their instinct is to move toward the light. And their instinct is also to avoid turbulence, so they will move out of turbulent waters and avoid the places where they have

learned the waters are turbulent. And so as part of this research, they made the light for these sea slugs also places of turbulent waters. What they found was eventually, these sea slugs would stop going to the light. They had learned that the light meant turbulence, so even when they would put light elsewhere where the water was calm, these sea slugs had learned to fight against their own instincts of moving to the light. And as those sea slugs reproduced, like the fleas, their offspring would also not go toward the light. The turbulence had caused them to go against their God-given instinct.

And we too, God has knit it within us to be a people of the light. As the church we are to be a people of light - a city built on the hill. We are to be a people who live by a counter-narrative from the rest of the world. A narrative of a table where there is always enough for all and there is always room for one more. This is our narrative as people of the light.

This is the story Jesus was telling and trying to get us to form our lives around. And most of us also try to avoid turbulence. At least, I know I do, trying to find my way out of turbulent times and conversations as quickly as possible. Dreading action for justice and peace that I know will be contentious and conflictual. This is part of why I have chosen to do Alternatives to Violence Project, hoping for myself to become slightly more okay with times of conflict and turbulent situations.

We too avoid the light because we don't like when things are turbulent.

We avoid the light by:

-avoiding naming pain and lament

-saying political things should stay out of the pulpit

-staying around those who mostly think like us

-we avoid the light by numbing ourselves with electronics and substances

-we avoid the light when we don't inquire about the lives of others, especially those whose lives and experiences are much different than ours

-we avoid light by trying to protect our children from all pain; by trying to not let them know about some of the painful truths of our world. Just this week, while I was in Indiana we got the news that my Grandma's cancer has spread and she has just a few months left. And so my brother has to decide, will they tell their kids - will they take their kids to see her, even as she gets weaker and closer to death.

-And we avoid the light because we know that light seekers often meet turbulence; they meet trouble; they get criticized by opponents and friends alike; they are resisted, sometimes even hated – light seekers often come to an early and violent death.

But we are people of light. And we know that Jesus did not just want us to flourish individually within broken systems while others are oppressed and suffer and are excluded from a chance to flourish. And so to be people of light we must be willing to live in the turbulence.

I learned that the one thing that might cause an elephant who is trained to think it can only move in a small area - the one thing that might cause it to forget that and go beyond its usual boundaries is when it sees a young elephant being mistreated or beaten. This has caused elephants to “go rogue” and attack the trainers, seeking to protect that young elephant.

And if you put a few new young fleas into that jar who were not bred there, well they will not follow the rest of the fleas, but will jump right out of that jar.

And Davide Anderson Hooker found in that during his summer research project, if you put a couple of sea slugs into this group/pod that didn't grow up there, they will not be like the others who have stopped seeking the light – they will instinctively go to the light. And when they do they'll rub up against others going the other way. They'll rub up against some going away

from the light, and in rubbing up against someone going to the light, some will remember their God-given instincts and change course and again head for the light.

As John Paul Lederach says, you don't need critical mass to change the world. You just need critical yeast. Just enough active change agents working and organizing and loving and pushing.

Scholars think that at best, at best Jesus had 470 people with him. A core of his few disciples, and then at best another 450 people trying to follow him and reform their lives around the narrative he was telling.

Less than 500 people to change the course history, the way we mark our calendars, the way we consider what is most important in this life. That small group of followers, and here we are 2,000 years later because of those few.. Just a bit of critical yeast to help others to rise. Just a few committed to a counter-story. A story of love. A story that is worried about the flourishing of all. A story of a table that always has enough for all and an open seat for one more.

We in the church are the yeast; we are the mustard seed. This is our calling. We are to tell a counter narrative. We are to live a counter narrative.

As one pastor reminded me this week, the most important thing happening this week is not happening at the Idaho State Capital, or even in Washington DC. The most important thing happening this week is happening right here among us. It is happening in our meeting here to remember who we are as people of the light; to renew and reform ourselves as people of the

light, who go toward the light even if there is turbulence. In our gathering to hear a word or say a prayer or sing a song that renews us in our commitment as people of the light. That reminds us that we are people of this counter-narrative, the narrative of the flourishing of all; of a place at the table for all - what Jesus called the Kingdom of God. Of saying we 99 sheep are not free until we find that one lost sheep; that we can never fully flourish until all one-hundred are able to flourish.

It might be the first time you've ever heard this, or at least as a directive from the pulpit, let's be some slimy slugs - slugs headed to the light!

<sup>33</sup>He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

May we be such a people. Amen.

Sending Blessing

*ANd now as you go from this place, may the God of Life go with you -  
renewing us as a people of Your story,  
A story of enough  
A story of love  
A story of critical yeast changing the world -  
Renew us in that belief, O God,  
That healing and hope might flow through us and to the world.  
Go in Peace.  
Amen.*

