THE NEW SHOFAR

The church is not a place where perfect people gather to say perfect things, or have perfect thoughts, or have perfect feelings. The Church is a place where imperfect people gather to provide encouragement, support, and service to each other as we press on in our journey to return to our Heavenly Father. — Joseph B. Wirthlin

July 19th, 2026
SHORTER VERSION

Can anything separate us from the love of Christ?

Ever the "good man" bringing forth an abundance of good things out of the store of his Heart, Jesus is again (**cf. 13:24**) said to "propose" a parable to the crowds. In this narrative-in-parable form Jesus creates an atmosphere that illustrates how, as divine Word, he attracts by persuading rather than by compelling. The number and variety of the parables show God's Wisdom as leaving no approach to man's heart untried. The omnipotent Word manifests his power through mercy administered with patience. *He wants to be loved more than to be obeyed, or to be obeyed only as a way of being loved*.

Perhaps with a touch of whimsicality, we could look at Jesus' education of the crowds in the things of his Kingdom as a training of the human palate to ever finer fare. First, he spoke of the virtues of salt (**5:13**). Now, he proposes the zest of mustard. In a moment it will be "fish of every kind" (**13:47**). Eventually he will astound us by perfecting the banquet with the offer of the bread and wine of his own person (**26:26–28**). Nor is it likely, after Jesus' praise of mustard here, that this condiment will be missing from table at the eschatological wedding feast! For, if the King pays such attention to the wedding garment, surely he will not neglect the seasoning for his carefully fatted calves (cf. **22:1–14**)!

The essential meaning is as plain as it is profound: the authentic works of God always begin in a very small way; that the divine Presence and actions, therefore, are most likely to be either overlooked as non-existent or scorned as insignificant; for these reasons the person truly searching for God and his Kingdom must have not only a great desire for them but also equally great patience in order to wait for the full and incontestable development of God's work in our midst.

For a very long time, we may be unable to discern what growth or fruit will come from a given seed. We may also be misled by the apparent importance of larger seeds, as if what first appears more impressive will yield the richer and more enduring harvest. This parable turns life's expectations, the world's expectations on its ear. The might of the Roman Empire was no longer the standard. God's Kingdom has now been proclaimed and in Jesus of Nazareth direct divine rule established along the lines of the Sermon on the Mount.

Remember! God sees all things differently

While human beings are often drawn according to their size and characteristics, God takes delight in what is small and hidden. In Jesus' thought, the Kingdom and smallness seem inseparable: *Unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven* (**18:3**). Perhaps this is because God desires to fill all things with his goodness, and what is lowly offers him no resistance. Or perhaps smallness and hiddenness most closely reflect what God is in himself; when he comes into the world,

he is naturally drawn to what resembles him: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven* (**5:3**). Thus, when Jesus speaks most faithfully of his Father's Kingdom, he repeatedly turns to the images of seeds, soil, and slow growth.

According to him, we are to find the entire *Kingdom of the heaven**s*** in a mere grain of mustard seed, which will stick to your hand inadvertently or fly off to the ground unnoticed.

We are baptised to be *shade* for the Children of God

A mustard "grain" is only a tiny part of the whole mustard seed itself. Yet the mustard bush can grow to three metres, and near the Lake of Galilee even to four. This small wonder of nature is enough for Jesus to make the living dynamism of the mustard seed an image not only of his Father's Kingdom, but also of faith itself*: If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain*, *"Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you* (**17:20**). To have "*the faith of a grain of mustard* seed" is to think small, gather one's energies in a single direction (Godward), and stop measuring one's faith and life) against that of others. It is to grow patiently and persistently, desiring only to become what God has placed in one's own nature, however humble it may seem. It is to receive gratefully every ray of sun and every hint of moisture. After a lifetime of such modest fidelity, the seed becomes a paradise where many may dwell. To become shade and refuge for others is our highest reward—and our noble vocation.

What is highest, most sublimely all-encompassing, and constitutes God's proper dwelling place— *the kingdom of the heavens*—is revealed by Jesus to be found in what is lowest, smallest, and best stimulates an earthly creature's desires. Where we are, He is.

God chooses what is "low and despised in the world" to bring forth life for us in Christ Jesus; and in this parable Jesus takes a grain of mustard seed and sows it in *his* field. Before the seed begins its own movement toward life, the farmer has already made his contribution. Before what is "low and despised" is lifted into glory, God has freely intervened: he chooses what he will plant and causes it to prosper. The seed's nature can reach fulfilment only through the life and labour of the Sower, who enables it to realise its deepest potential. Unlike the Parable of the Sower, where seed is scattered in abundance, this parable centres on one mustard grain and the single tree that grows from it. From that one grain emerges a whole world of beautiful relationships. As it grows, the seed sends up a shoot, then a stalk, and finally branches. No sooner has it become a shrub than it continues its transformation: it "becomes a tree", and the whole world gathers in its shade. And we are…?