

I myself will take a sprig  
    from the lofty top of a cedar...  
I myself will plant it  
    on a high and lofty mountain....  
in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit,  
    and become a noble cedar.  
Under it every kind of bird will live;  
    in the shade of its branches will nest  
    winged creatures of every kind.      *Ezekiel 17:22-23*

The people of Israel—the Jews of Jesus' time, were used to comparing the kingdom of God to the most majestic, tall tree that existed in the Holy Land at the time: cedars. More specifically: the Cedars of Lebanon.

It would be as if we in the eastern United States compared the kingdom of heaven to the mighty oak, or in the western US, the giant sequoia. The kingdom of God is noble, and stately.

In the reading from Ezekiel, God takes just a sprig and plants it on a tall and lofty mountain.

The followers of Jesus can probably hear echoes of this passage from Ezekiel in Jesus' teaching:

*The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground... and the seed would sprout and grow.*

“Yes”—they might be nodding to themselves—“seeds of the kingdom sprout and grow into tall noble Cedars.”

Then Jesus throws them a curve:

*With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."*

One priest I worked with in the past handed out tiny packets of mustard seeds to each member of the congregation when he preached on this reading, to show them how small a mustard seed is. For those of you who don't know: it's pretty dang small.

But how many of you know about the mustard *tree*, or mustard *plant*? Did you, for example, know that the mustard tree is the Holy Land equivalent of Kudzu? It is. Really. Google it.

You all probably know Kudzu—those pesky vines that blow in from who knows where to root in gardens, along highways, taking over other plants, fences, houses and small children if they stand still too long. Kudzu vines can grow at the rate of 7 feet per week, and is impervious to most herbicides. You can't kill it. We had it all over the place when I lived in Florida, so I know.

Well, imagine the surprise of the disciples listening to Jesus, when instead of comparing the kingdom of God to a lofty cedar, he instead likened the Kingdom of God to Kudzu?

It is easy to think of the Kingdom of God as reaching loftily to the skies, towering over the earth, rising with a majesty that is unparalleled.

It's quite another to think of the Kingdom of God as kudzu, a plant that can and does grow anywhere, and which will grow in any climate, but better in some than others, a vine that can provide a food source for both animals and people, and that is darn near impossible to eradicate through any means we attempt.

That Jesus. What was he talking about?

...Wait a minute... the kingdom of God is like a plant that grows anywhere, sometimes faster, sometimes slower, depending on the soil it grows in.

...Wait: the kingdom of God is a food source...

...Wait--the kingdom of God is not a respecter of persons: it will grow wherever it wants, in the gardens of the rich and the poor.

...Wait: The kingdom of God is impossible to destroy, remove abolish, eliminate, extinguish, squash, uproot, wipe out.

That Jesus—he's a genius!

The kingdom of God can start small, but soon grows past all bounds, finding new life everywhere. Kudzu.

*With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up – like Kudzu--and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."*

You can't get rid of it, it spreads everywhere and nothing—and I do mean NOTHING-- will destroy it.

Amen.