

Once upon a time, a biblical storyteller talking about the kingdom of heaven would certainly have been talking about the nation of Israel.

Named after the grandson of Abraham and Sarah, this nomadic family grew like mustard seed in Egypt, a little band of foreign immigrants that exploded into a populous problem, like too much leaven stretching too little loaf.

Slavery, conflict, and calamity followed before the people escaped into the wilderness and meandered there a full, formative generation until taking over a land once walked by Abraham and Sarah, the land that God had promised them.

Now, rather suddenly, this little kingdom of heaven has become an international power.

The military and cultural triumphs of King David and his forty year administration have positioned Israel as a player among the nations.

The population is robust, the geography has expanded, and now governing this great people is serious, strenuous business.

David's glorious reign has come to its inglorious end, and now the coveted throne has been passed to young Solomon.

It is far more than he is prepared to handle.

When God appears to him in a dream and says, *Ask what I should give you*, the truth is that God has already given him too much.

Overwhelmed, overcome, in over his head, Solomon tells God with a mixture of gratitude and candor what has already been given, what God has already done, and how it is already too much for him.

He asks for an understanding mind to govern this great kingdom.

This is all a dear and distant memory by the time that Jesus sits staring at his disciples, the twelve that he has hand-picked to re-invent Israel, once a great nation of twelve tribes but now a backwater occupation of the Roman empire.

Jesus sits instructing these childish leaders in the basics of the kingdom of heaven.

What was once too much for Solomon, Jesus is expanding.

The kingdom of heaven, Jesus says, is far broader, wider, deeper, expansive, complex, unmanageable and unimaginable than King David's glorious empire.

The reach and the dynamics of the kingdom of heaven would blow King Solomon's gifted mind.

It is like a woman hiding yeast, which means she must be Gentile, which means she must be outside the kingdom of heaven, because Jews eat unleavened bread in a kingdom where God's activity is only done transparently by men, not secretly by women, and certainly not spoiling and wasting an entirely good loaf of bread.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed--which is a weed, unclean, unholy, to be rooted out--that grows into a tree, which mustard seed of course doesn't do.

The kingdom of heaven, Jesus says, on a roll now, is like a finest pearl, which any clam will tell you comes only after the most intense irritation, which is purchased by a man who is stupid enough to commit economic suicide to finance it.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field that is so great you don't just dig it up and sneak it out, you buy the whole field.

The kingdom of heaven is like a net that drags up everything (Jesus never uses the word *fish*, though presumably they are in there too) and requires supernatural powers to come and sort things out.

The kingdom of heaven is like so many different things that are not like anything these poor guys have ever heard before, not even like the last weird example, and certainly not anything like the life of holiness in which they had been trained.

It is like corruption and financial ruin and beauty and buried treasure and weeds as big as trees and an overfull garbage truck being sifted by angels.

Have you understood all this, he asks these twelve overwhelmed minds, these little children foisted upon the throne of the kingdom of heaven, these new masters of God's castle, and if God were to appear to them in a dream right now and say *Ask what I should give you*, the truth is they would say, *Please, dear God, make him stop talking*.

This kingdom of yours is far too much for us to handle...why is he giving us more?

But his question hangs in the air, *Have you understood all this*, and the only recourse now is to lie and say *yes* and hope that's enough to satisfy Jesus and move him on to something, anything else.

"Yup, got it, no need to ask us any more questions, we understand."

And for some reason, some reason as inexplicable as the kingdom of heaven, Jesus buys it.

Maybe it's just his gentle, compassionate, understanding nature.

Maybe Jesus is just so punch-drunk on his vision of what cannot be seen or his verbal picture gallery of what cannot be expressed that he isn't even registering the obvious terror and trauma of cluelessness in his students' overwhelmed faces.

Or maybe Jesus looks right into their eyes and sees it all: the confusion, the questions, the doubts, the distractions, the stares as empty as a vacant lot, and he bets that underneath somewhere, buried deep inside these twelve desperate liars, is hidden treasure, and he's just going to keep digging until he finds it.

Because that's how the kingdom of heaven works, and because Jesus trusts it enough to risk ridicule and ruin, in a class and on a cross, to buy it completely.

This kingdom of heaven continues to grow, to flourish, to expand, to push, to demand, to drag, to compel, to inspire, to hide under, rise up, and overwhelm.

It continues to defy boundaries, baffle great minds and come as a gift to those who cannot possibly be ready to handle it.

Such is the story of Austin Bryan Loeb, baptized today at Resurrection.

The kingdom of heaven, of course, is far more expansive than our little corner of God's field, this tiny slice of God's creation, but even here, in this little community that is his new family of faith, Austin is given far more than he will be able to handle.

This household has treasures new and old; this net drags in such a vast and funny smelling assortment of humanity that sometimes even the angels are left scratching their heads.

This field has been overgrown by a mustard seed named SummerFest and has buried beneath its surface so many saints and stories, so much wisdom and treasure that doesn't just sit there hoping to be dug up someday but keeps pushing up, bubbling up, rising up like yeast to keep leavening this loaf we continue to share.

The kingdom will serenade Austin and pinch his toes and kiss his cheeks and hand him a lit

candle he's not ready to hold and call him to a responsibility far too vast for him to
imagine much less perform.

He is only a little child; he does not know how to go out or come in, yet we name him minister
and missionary, Christ-bearer and brother, scribe for the kingdom and heir to God's glory.

We see a mustard seed and we expect a tree.

And so, with Solomon, we pray for him, that the God who gives him far more than he can
handle will also give him the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel
and might, knowledge, fear of the Lord, and especially joy in God's presence...

the kind of joy that only comes to those who find treasure...

the kind of joy in the eyes of Jesus when he rambles poetic about the kingdom...

the kind of joy that God, inexplicably and inexhaustibly, takes in Solomon and in

Austin and in us all.