# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“The Mustard Seed and the Yeast”**

**Matthew 13:31-33**

 **October 9, 2022**

When I was a boy growing up in Denmark and Norway, I was fascinated by stories of Danish and Norwegian resistance to the German occupation during WWII. In Denmark, when Hitler declared that all Danish Jews were required to wear the yellow Star of David, the king of Denmark, Christian X, became a symbol of the resistance when he put on a star and encouraged his fellow Danes to do the same. In Norway, a series of sabotage efforts by the Norwegian underground successfully led to the destruction of the largest heavy-water plant in the world, which had served as a critical source of heavy water for the Germans in their effort to develop the first atom bomb.

These resistance movements, which were found in every country Germany occupied, arose as a response to the evil of the Nazi regime. Operating secretly and often living in hiding, these brave men and women worked against the occupation. As the war wore on, the will to fight on covertly was in large measure kept alive by one abiding hope – the rumored coming Allied invasion. Finally, on June 6, 1944, D-Day, the Allied invasion of Western Europe began.

On the surface, German strength and military might appeared unstoppable. It looked indeed, as Hitler had proclaimed, like the beginning of a 1000-year-empire. But hidden among the terrorized were those who dared to resist. Theirs was a hidden power that proved invaluable to the Allied effort to end the war.

The power that Jesus brought with his announcement of the arrival of the kingdom of heaven did not exhibit the kind of worldly domination that many expected. Jesus could indeed perform powerful miracles, but they were short-lived and selective. Rome still controlled the land, and ruthless leaders still induced fear in the population.

So Jesus used his parables to teach that while the kingdom of heaven is hidden to many, it is still powerful in its ability to transform evil into good. It is small in its beginning, but it will bring the reality of salvation from sin to all who dare to come to it with eyes of faith and an open heart. Two such parables are found in Matthew 13:31-33 and I invite you to turn there with me

Here is another illustration Jesus used: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed planted in a field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of garden plants; it grows into a tree, and birds come and make nests in its branches.” Jesus also used this illustration: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman used in making bread. Even though she put only a little yeast in three measures of flour, it permeated every part of the dough.”

The proverbial smallness of the mustard seed as a metaphor that describes the kingdom of God would have shocked the crowd. Israel always believed that when God’s kingdom was established on earth, it would be great; they were not prepared for an insignificant beginning. But through this parable Jesus declares that the kingdom is already present and at work, and people should not doubt its ultimate greatness. What may not look like much to the world will in fact fulfill all God’s promises to those who love him.

In the parable of the yeast, Jesus continues the thought of the parable of the mustard seed. Yeast is a form of fungi that multiplies rapidly because of fermentation, and it only requires a small amount mixed into or “hidden” in the flour to cause the bread to rise. The kingdom of God is active in the world, although it is not fully observable. In spite of its small inauspicious beginnings, the kingdom of heaven will permeate the world and eventually produce the promised greatness.

For many of us, it feels like we’re in occupied territory. The enemy is strong and shows no signs of weakening; indeed, he seems to grow stronger by the year. Yet, Christ calls us to join his spiritual underground which is empowered by the often hidden reality that God is at work in the world, bringing about his kingdom. And as was the hope of D-Day for those who resisted in WWII, so is the hope of Jesus’ return for us who resist the present evil.

In the meantime, as citizens of the kingdom, we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Our mission is to bring good news of the power of the kingdom that transforms human hearts today, and which will one day dramatically transform the entire world in which we live.