

CHAPTER 14: A SOCIETY OF MUSTARD SEEDS

GOSPEL READINGS: Matthew 13:31-32

“Why does a mustard seed attract comparison to the kingdom of God? Because for Jesus the kingdom is about the ordinariness of loving God and loving others. The kingdom is as common as sparrows, as earthy as backyard bushes, as routine as breakfast coffee, and as normal as aging. He hallows the ordinary act of love, making it extraordinary. Instead of finding it in the majestic, Jesus sees God’s kingdom in the mundane. The kingdom of God is the transforming presence of God in ordinary humans who live out the Jesus Creed.” - Scot McKnight, chapter 14.

1. The “kingdom” Jesus describes is often described as “upside down” or *paradoxical*. What are some other ways God’s values seem contradictory to our nature? (*see list below for ideas*)
 - a. When his listeners expected *paradise*, Jesus reoriented them to seeing beauty in messiness, wealth in poverty, strength in weakness. Why do you think this proclamation was shocking to their ears?
 - b. How is this message shocking today?
2. What are some of the challenge of communicating God’s value system to the people in our life?

McKnight describes Jesus’ choice between two symbols of the kingdom: the sword or the mustard seed. Opting for the latter, Jesus commits to a way of peace over violence. More personally, he commits to an approach of tenderness in fostering our growth rather than forcing his subjects to cower in obedience.

3. What should Jesus’ attitude teach us about God’s patience in our spiritual growth and transformation?
4. What should Jesus’ attitude teach us about *our* patience in others’ transformation?

Finally, McKnight describes how Jesus himself embodies *paradox*. Consider Jesus’ unique style, voice, and actions that set him apart from natural or *expected* leadership.

5. What are some of these paradoxes?
6. How can Jesus demonstrate an attitude or actions that teach us how to engage our world?
7. What paradox is the most challenging for *you* to experience or embody?
8. How can you (or your group) pray for personal transformation in this area?

Some kingdom paradoxes from the gospels:

Laboring to rest; walking by faith - not by sight; giving to receive; being enslaved to be free; finding fool’s wisdom; yielding to conquer; serving to reign; dying to live.

(from Tom Taylor’s *Paradox: Coming to Grips with the Contradictions of Jesus*)

Returning January 6 » Chapter 15: A Society for Justice