6.13.2021

*with what can we compare the kingdom of god*

when I lived in ohio, I had a very dear friend Sarah who would occasionally manage to convince me to go into the environmental center across the street from us to weed out garlic mustard, an invasive plant that grows throughout much of the Northeast and the Midwest.

and sarah and the environmental group at Kenyon would spend weekends pulling out this garlic mustard, and would turn some of it into pesto, which was not *as* good as basil pesto, but good enough for us college students to eat for the summer.

so when I hear Jesus telling the disciples that the kingdom of god is like a mustard seed, I think of the garlic mustard, overtaking the trails, over taking the native plants in rural Ohio.

I think of sarah and the rest of the group trying *so hard* over several yearsto remove this plant, to stop it from spreading its seeds each year.

and I think of the utter foolishness that would be the action of *purposefully* planting this seed.

and it is utter foolishness. it is nothing. the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which, when it is sown upon the ground.

beloveds, it is foolish to sow the mustards seed upon the ground! it would take over all of the other plants!

*and yet*

the kingdom of God, it is like a mustard seen, which, when it is 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,

I also want to pause and look at once this mustard shrub is all grown

surely, if it has become the *greatest of all shrubs,* and its branches are so so large that it must?

produce *the most* mustard? bear some sort of fruit? do something?

*and yet*

it does not *produce mustard*

it cannot be harvested for pesto as the invasive garlic mustard along the banks of the Kokosing was.

so then, will the mustard shrub produce something for the person that has sown the seeds?

*what is the purpose of this shrub, what then is the purpose of the kingdom*

it appears that the mustard shrub has no purpose for the person that has sown the seeds.

and when it puts forth large branches, the birds of the air can make nests in the shade

*this? this? this shrub, the kingdom of God has* been sown so that birds? can make nests in the shade?

Yes, dear ones, yes.

The kingdom of God has been planted, as has grown, for no purpose or gain for the one that has sown it, but for the birds.

It has been planted, not for the

Dear ones, it is for us to make our nests in its shade, and to draw others into this shade.

Lectionary writer Debie Thomas writes, “the last image in this set of parables is that of nesting birds finding shade in the branches of the mustard plant. it’s a pretty image on it’s face, but it, too, turns out, is a joke: wo wants birds taking up residence in their gardens? But the kingdom of God is all about welcoming the unwelcome. Sheltering the unwanted. Practicing radical inclusion. the garden of God doesn’t exist for itself; it exists to offer nourishment to everyone the world deems unworthy. it exists to attract and to house the very people we’d rather shut. it’s primary purpose is hospitality, not productivity.”

the kingdom of God is here, dear ones, for us to make our nests in.

as john writes in his revelation, Look! the tabernacle of God is with man, and he will dwell with them. they will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

we are a new creation, a new shrub, a new plant, one sown not for our own gain, not for our own productivity, not to bear the most fruit, but only out of God’s love of us and our love for each other

our God is not a God of productivity, and our God’s Kingdom, our Kingdom, is not one of productivity, either. the kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed, on the ground, and would sleep.

and yet

none of this is how I desire the kingdom of god to be working.

I do not want the kingdom of God to be someone scattering seeds, to go to sleep, then returning at the end of the season for the harvest.

I do not want the kingdom of God to be tended to by someone who does not know how seeds grow, or how they sprout.

and yet

the kingdom of God comes to us, as a baby, not as an independent adult

the kingdom of God comes to us, not as a ruler, not as a king, not as a President, but as someone so outside of our human-made power structures

the kingdom of God comes to us, as God Himself crucified, and dead, and asleep

the kingdom of God comes to us not because we are worthy, but because, as Nadia Boltz-Weber writes, it comes to us because God would rather die than be in our-sin accounting business anymore

the kingdom of God comes not with proper documents, it comes not with economic benefit, but the kingdom of God comes to us through those being told do not come, we have no space, no need for you here, and yet the kingdom of God is here.

the kingdom of God does not come to us in our earthly power, not in our manicured lawns, not in our borders, not even in our gardens, not even as the garlic mustard turned into pesto, but as a shrub where the birds, who have helped not at all to grow the shrub, who may even eat the other crops around the shrub, may make their nests, be fed, and sleep.