

Like most kids, I went through that phase where every other sentence was a question. Why is the sky blue? Why do you always watch the news? Don't you know there are cartoons on? What makes the car go? What makes a tree grow? And, worst of all... where do babies come from? The answer: The hospital. Here's the bill to prove it. God bless them, sometimes Mom and Dad would stop what they were doing and give me the best answer they could. Other times the answer was "Go ask your mother" or "Go ask your father." Questions can go from endearing to annoying.

Jesus must have felt that way sometimes, beleaguered by constant questions from people who, more often than not, couldn't understand the answers. And he didn't have the option to say "Go ask your Father," since God had sent him to us with teaching as an important part of his mission. So, perhaps after wondering to himself, "how am I ever going to explain this to them?" Jesus got creative, putting divine revelations into language simple and familiar enough for children, and first-century peasants, to understand— yet, that same language has such depth and profundity, so many layers and facets of meaning, that today it still captivates the intellect and imagination of people of all levels of ability.

So, one question was, what is the Kingdom of God like? What might Jesus have answered? The Kingdom of God is like... tall mountains and vast seas? Much too small. The Roman Empire? God, no. The sun at dawn? Not quite. A unified eschatological hypostatic continuum? What does that even mean? No, no, no... the Kingdom of God is like... seed. Now we're getting somewhere. Seeds are, in a sense, all over the place, but they start out so small they're basically hidden. Maybe just a few people know where this seed is; maybe a few more know where to look. But then a series of miracles takes place, each bigger and more visible than the last. Sprouting, growth, and grain, the subtle and elegant mysteries of new life coming into the world. But even though the Kingdom of God comes to the world gradually and quietly, Jesus also points out that this arrival is not an end in itself, but a preparation for something even bigger, although from the same source. Rather, God intends to intervene decisively in the course of human affairs, a moment that will arrive with all the subtlety of a Looney Tunes anvil.

The arrival of the Kingdom of God will be the end of the world as we know it, but this moment is nothing to fear. The Kingdom of God is "the way things should be," according to God, the only one who has the authority to define what's right and what's wrong.

And God gives us more than a metaphor, more than a parable. God's Kingdom was present in everything Jesus did, putting an end to hunger and thirst as well as ostracism and injustice. When we obey Jesus's teachings to go and do likewise, the Kingdom of God is no less present.

The Kingdom of God is piquant like a mustard seed and persistent, an impulse to God's justice that won't go away, like a seed caught inside our socks, pressing on us,

irritating us until we stop doing what we think is important and give the seed our full attention, bringing it out into the world to take root and grow.

These sorts of answers can get us a long way. For many people, it's all they need. But St. Paul was writing to a community that needed a bit more. He wrote not in rustic, agricultural similes, but in the elevated register of ancient intellectual discourse, which bears some unpacking. When he writes, "For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you," I believe he is referring to the severe consequences he brought on himself by persisting in his apostolic mission. That would seem crazy to anyone outside the church, and possibly to some Christians, too. But he knew he had to be "in his right mind," that is, making logical arguments, to address the needs, concerns, and questions of the church.

He also wrote, "one has died for all; therefore all have died." Which on the face of it is simply untrue. Fortunately, he went on to say, "everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" So he's talking about how profoundly transformative God's work is. By raising Jesus from the dead, God showed that Jesus was not merely a good teacher; to see Jesus as merely the embodiment of any human category is to miss the point. While Jesus was fully human, he is also fully divine, and only because of his divinity do his death and resurrection make it possible for anyone to live in the new and everlasting life that God intends for all humanity.

So the Kingdom of God is like a seed, because it is our true and eternal sustenance. It is the life of the world, a gift from God that God calls us to tend and nurture. This is our work until Christ comes again to receive our accounts of our stewardship of this gift, to separate out death from life, greed from grace, wickedness from wisdom. Those things which God chose not to create, which mock and corrupt God's creation, will be cast out and put away forever, and all the splendid diverse goodness of God will grow without bound.

Until then, however, God leaves it to us to make as much progress as we can with the abundant blessings God has given us: time and energy, material and ingenuity, dedication and compassion. Through our good choices and God's transcendent life-giving presence, the seed of the Kingdom grows into the new Tree of Life, greater even than the trees of Eden. This tree is beautiful, but it is not ornamental.

God entrusts this most sacred tree to us, not to cut back into a shape that pleases our simple eyes but to nurture into the expansive fullness of its potential. Its branches will grow broader, beyond the point we would have imagined them to collapse; its top will swiftly surpass our view; its canopy will resound with the joyful cries of the life that abides in its shelter. At long last, the will of God for all life will, unquestionably, be fulfilled; the lines between church and world, heaven and earth, will vanish; and life will thrive in God's world without end.