

Mark 4: 26 – 34, The Kingdom – An Audacious BHAG
Newtonbrook United Church, June 14, 2009

Jesus tells us, according to the gospel of Mark, that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, for example.

Within that small seed is a whole plant that can grow to be quite large. Within each of our small actions of sharing the love that is in our hearts is a wonderful world of care and compassion that can lead to peace and justice for the whole world.

One of the professional interpreters of the gospel of Mark¹ writes that this parable, by showing the difference between the small seed and the large plant that grows from it, is meant to encourage the small group of disciples and assure them that their efforts will grow to something that is much greater than themselves.

This parable has also encouraged those who take their faith on an individualistic basis. The approach of people like Deepak Chopra, for example, is that peace in God's world will come as a result of transformed individuals – not through transformed systems. Chopra writes that:

"We aren't here to make the world evolve. We are here to evolve as individuals and then to spread that influence."²

One example of how to change the world is given in the parable of the mustard seed. There is a profound truth in that parable and many times it has been interpreted as affirming the power of all the little things that we do – how the world is changed through each loving action.

All that is true – and affirmed by those who study chaos theory, for example. They have convinced us that a butterfly flapping its wings in a tropical rainforest might just possibly create a disastrous storm.

All that is true AND YET there is a part of the parable that we have sometimes overlooked.

In both of the parables that we heard Lillian read this morning the subject is the Kingdom of God. I am going to invite you to focus on **The Kingdom as An Audacious BHAG**. You may not agree with me – and that's OK. As Meg Wheatley says:

"There is no need for us to be joined at the head. We are already joined by our human hearts."³

¹ Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man, page 179/180

² <http://www.chopra.com/peace>

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Something that I learned when I was away at a conference in Pittsburgh last week is that we all need a BHAG. The conference was called: **“Reading The Past: Writing The Future”**

It was the Rev. Dr. John Sabatelli of Christ Church in Baltimore Maryland⁴ who convinced me of the wisdom of having a BHAG. If you didn't bring yours with you today, I'm inviting you to think about getting one.

That goes for the congregation of Newtonbrook too. BHAGs are good for the soul.

The Kingdom of God, or you may call it The Realm of God, or I prefer to call it the World of God's Dreams is a BHAG. It is an audacious BHAG.

I've probably mentioned that acronym too many times – BHAG – what does it mean to say that the World of God's dreams is a BHAG?

B = Big – as big as one can imagine – or God can imagine!

H = hairy – like in Chewbacca that big hairy beast from Star Wars that was Hans Solo's partner on the Millenium Falcon

A = audacious – as in Barak Obama's book, the Audacity of Hope – a title that was inspired by a sermon of the same name by his former pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright.

G = Goals – what we are attempting to accomplish – what we are here for, our purpose in life.

Big Hairy Audacious Goals – that's what it means when I say that the World of God's Dreams is an audacious BHAG. That's because God can dream bigger than any of us could ever imagine AND YET God has invited us to be a part of the project to build that world. We even pray for that world every time that we pray the Lord's Prayer – ***Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven!*** What an audacious goal!

What an inspiring thought!

³ Margaret Wheatley, “Finding Our Way: Leadership for an uncertain time” page 213

⁴ <http://www.christinnerharbor.org/>

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Of course, having a BHAG involves risk. We have to move from where we are to a new place on our earthly journey. Whenever it comes to risk, I try to remember the words of Edwin Friedman;

**“The safest place for ships is in the harbour –
but that’s not why ships were built.”**

Jesus calls us to leave our safe places in order to be a part of the Kingdom of God.

Having a BHAG is inspiring because it takes us out of ourselves and engages us in something that is beyond us. St. Francis of Assisi said that it is in giving that we receive and that spiritual truth applies to the World of God’s Dreams. When we are involved in attempting to build the Kingdom of God here on earth we are involved in God’s mission – a mission that is beyond us, AND YET, just like the mustard seed, it is also within us.

Having a BHAG feeds our souls because it takes us outside ourselves and helps make a difference in God’s world.

At “Reading the Past; Writing the Future” I went to the seminar presented by the Rev. Dr. John Sabatelli because it was called, **“What are successful churches doing to stay successful?”**

One point near the top of the handout was:

“Focus on mission not maintenance – have a large and significant vision (In other words - a BHAG).

We know of people who have had these large dreams – people like Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who expressed a BHAG in his, “I Have A Dream” speech. President Obama may be another of those people.

Jesus had a BHAG – for Jesus continually spoke of the World of God’s Dreams where all can live in peace with justice; where love abounds, and where care and compassion are the norm.

Jesus spoke about “The Kingdom”, I believe, because it is one way of describing God’s Mission in God’s world.

At the Annual Meeting of Toronto Conference we heard the Rev. Bruce Gregerson speak about God’s Mission – and how we humans, and followers of Jesus, are constantly trying to catch up with God who has

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a mission. Bruce made the point that we attempt to join in God's mission, NOT ask God to join in our mission⁵. I think that on my better days, that's what inspires me – joining in God's mission. On other days, I find myself in a little world asking God to be a part of what I want and what I'm feeling.

I consider that one of the most meaningful spiritual practices that Christians commit to, and where we find God's support and presence, is the practice of **generosity**. That can be a BHAG – just imagine committing to living in a constant state of becoming more generous! This applies to us both as individuals and as a Christian community.

Generosity doesn't just mean money – it can also mean our attitude towards others, in forgiveness, for example.

When I think about the Drop Inn here at Newtonbrook, for example, I see huge amounts of generosity in terms of time that is shared, gifts that are shared, and money that is given to support this Christian ministry. I believe that the Drop Inn here at Newtonbrook is an example of how we are involved in God's mission of creating the Realm of God.

On Friday I saw that hundreds of hours of volunteer time were generously invested by people in this Christian community in hosting the annual, Strawberry Tea. It was an event that said to the guests that they are important children of God, and they have not been forgotten by this Christian community.

More from Pittsburgh:

Two of the other points that Rev. Dr. Sabatelli offered to us about being a healthy congregation were;

- **give things away** – at Christ Church the buildings are used for serving their neighbourhood, and establishing contacts in the neighbourhood. It was hard for me to understand that NO RENT is charged to the neighbours of Christ Church!
- **be committed to / involved in the neighbourhood** – just like Newtonbrook already has a reputation for serving others. Christ Church in Baltimore operates a 40 bed homeless shelter, for example. Apparently one of their signs says that Christ church in Baltimore is, **A community of faith for the community we love.**"

⁵ From my notes from Toronto Conference.

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Today, after worship, Newtonbrook will gather as a Christian community to receive an important report on your mission and ministry here in this part of God's world. I will be interested in how the Spirit will blow through us and guide us into planting the seeds for the future of ministry by this congregation? Which seeds from the JNAC report will germinate to become the trees of God's dreams? Are there any BHAGs that we will talk about?

As we go into God's world may God's Spirit blow through us, bringing us strength and courage to dream dreams, and to bring those Big Hairy, Audacious Goals to life.

Song # 150 in More Voices – Spirit God, Be Our Breath