



Session 10
Winter 2015–16
Primary

Mustard seed and yeast

LUKE 13:18–21

prepare



PRAYER

God, you are ruler of all things great and small, yet you often work in unassuming ways. Let me be inspired by the small beginnings of your works. Amen.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

To explore parables of God's kingdom

STORY SUMMARY

Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. He asked, "What is God's kingdom like?" He answered the question with two parables. First, he said the kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed, which when someone planted it, grew into a tree big enough for nesting birds. Then, he said it is like yeast that a woman added to flour. The yeast, when kneaded into dough, caused the whole loaf to rise.

teaching tips for primary

The parables in today's story offer children ways to understand God's kingdom. Children know about things starting small and growing. While children probably have direct experiences with seeds, they may not have watched yeast work. Offer the Explore (Discover) option so that children can observe what happens. Let the children wonder about the parables and invite their reactions and interpretations. They may have some surprising ideas and new perspectives.

Decide which Explore activities you will do. Bring several packets of yeast for use with the Bible story and Explore (Discover). If possible, find a bird's nest to use as a storytelling prop. If you plan to offer the Retell option in Explore, cut out a variety of shapes from different colors of felt so children can create a story scene. Check Supplies and To do throughout the session to see what needs to be prepared.

The presence of the kingdom

In Luke 13 Jesus is attended by very large crowds as he travels. Seemingly in response to the large numbers of would-be followers, Jesus speaks of the need to discern the nature of the kingdom and to count the cost of discipleship. Though many of Jesus' parables relate in some fashion to the kingdom of God, the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast speak of the unexpected nature of how the kingdom is present and growing in Jesus' ministry.

The parables of the mustard seed and the yeast fall on the heels of the parable of the unfruitful fig tree and the synagogue healing controversy. The fig tree is sometimes used in the Old Testament as a symbol of covenant faithfulness and fruitfulness. It is also used as a symbol of judgment when Israel is unfaithful. In the account of the fig tree, God's character is preserved as long-suffering and compassionate, yet there is an increased sense of urgency. Jesus' actions in the synagogue and his teachings that follow seem to underscore that the kingdom has already come and is presently at work in the world. The leader of the synagogue appears blind to this reality.

Jewish understandings of the kingdom

Some background on Jewish expectation of the coming of God's kingdom will be helpful. While other Jewish groups and writings spoke of the nearness and expectation of the kingdom, Jesus' preaching announced the presence or arrival (already-ness) of the kingdom.¹ Though Jewish groups had various expectations about the nature of the kingdom, all Jews believed that the kingdom would be universal and that the kingdom would be characterized by justice and righteousness.

Most Jews believed that history would be divided into two separate ages, this age and the age to come—the kingdom of God. This present, evil age would come to a swift, dramatic, and decisive end through God's direct intervention, and then God would establish the kingdom. Because of this popular expectation, Jesus' announcement of the arrival of the kingdom of God raised

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questions for many. If the kingdom of God is here, where is it? How is it that this present, evil age has not ended? How is the kingdom manifest?

Jesus answers the question

These two parables in Luke 13 speak to the unexpected manifestation of the kingdom. Both the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven are drawn from small acts that are a part of normal peasant life.

Comparing a spiritual reality to an illustration from daily life was a typical rabbinic method of teaching. There is some debate about whether the mustard seed Jesus speaks of is the typical weed-

like mustard plant or another plant that may grow 10–20 ft / 3–6 m high.² Nevertheless, everyone would have understood that even though a mustard seed is nearly imperceptible, its growth is prodigious. The parable of the leaven presents a similar image. A small amount to yeast eventually permeates a very large batch of dough. Three measures would roughly equal a 50 lb / 22 kg loaf.

The point in both parables is the contrast between small, imperceptible beginnings and large, expansive endings. Both parables call for a new way of thinking about the kingdom of God and suggest that this dynamic, sometimes imperceptible process is presently at work in the daily routines of life. A true perception of God's kingdom is not measured by its small beginnings but by perceiving its dynamic potential for growth. The kingdom in its present form is a growing, hidden reality that will one day reach its fullness. The kingdom has come and is at work in the world. Will you perceive it?

1. Some English translations, such as "the kingdom is at hand" or "the kingdom has drawn near," should be understood as announcing the kingdom's actual presence rather than nearness.

2. Both Daniel 4:12 and Ezekiel 17:22–24 use the image of large trees to speak of expansive kingdoms.

gather

supplies

- *Shine Songbook and CD*
- *Year Two Songbooks* (optional)
- CD player
- Bean bag or stuffed animal toy

poster pack

- Bible memory poster (Luke 4)

BUILD COMMUNITY

Gather in a circle. Have the children freely toss a beanbag or stuffed animal toy back and forth across the circle, until everyone has a chance to catch and throw it at least once. Then establish a throwing order, to make sure that children receive the beanbag or animal an equal number of times during the game.

For the game, choose a leader and give that person the beanbag. The leader tosses the beanbag to the next person, saying a kind message, such as “welcome,” “you are special,” “I’m glad you’re here,” or “God loves you.” Each person follows suit, repeating the chosen message while tossing the beanbag to the next person in the order. When the beanbag gets back to the leader, that person chooses someone else to lead the game.

WORSHIP TOGETHER

Sing “Life Together” (track 12, page 19 in the *Year Two Songbook*).

Lead the children in prayer, beginning with several moments of silence. Pray:

God, help us to learn more about your way of love and peace. Amen.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

As people of God’s kingdom, we can help spread God’s love when we pray for others. Provide prompts so children can pray silently for people in their lives. Ask children to close their eyes. Say:

Imagine you are at home. Pray for each person who lives with you. (Pause briefly.) Now imagine you are walking down the street by your house. Pray for the people who live nearby. (Pause briefly.) Imagine you are visiting a faraway place. Pray for the new people you meet. (Pause briefly.) Thank you, God, for loving all people. Amen.

media connections

- *Plant a Seed of Peace* by Rebecca Seiling
- *The Parables of Jesus* by Earnest Graham
- “Parables of the Mustard Seed and Yeast” by Luke TheBook (YouTube)
- “Parable of the Mustard Seed” by SJR Kids (YouTube)
- YouTube search for “Time-lapse dough rising”

Bible memory

Display the Bible memory poster. Read the verse with the children. March around the room in a line to the rhythm of the words. Then, try marching backwards and sideways while saying the verse. Practice the verse several times.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

—Luke 4:18–19

experience

SHARE THE STORY

Open a Bible to Luke 13 and show the Bible story illustration on page 226 in *Shine On*.

Use props as you share the story. For the first parable, give each child a mustard seed to hold. If possible, set out a bird's nest. Sprinkle granulated yeast on a solid-color cloth during the yeast parable. Then show a loaf of bread.

WONDER AND REFLECT

Talk about the story with the children. Use the following questions to encourage wondering and help the children make meaning from the story. Allow time for reflecting after each question. Children may have their own questions about the parables as well.

- (*Show mustard seed.*) I wonder who plants the tiny seed.
- Imagine making a nest in a great tree.
- I wonder why the birds chose this tree.
- (*Point to the yeast.*) I wonder why God's kingdom starts so small.
- Imagine being the woman who mixes and mixes the yeast and flour. I wonder how she feels.

Look at the Parables poster from the poster pack together. Invite children to find pictures that remind them of today's story. Extend children's thinking by having them look for all the things on the poster that start small and grow.

PEACE NOTES

God's kingdom started small, like a mustard seed, but it keeps growing. God's way of love can make us and others feel safe and loved, like the birds nesting in the mustard tree. Sing "God's Love Growing." The words are on page 4 of the Primary leaflet and are sung to the tune of "Oh, Susannah."



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teaching tip

The Parables poster is meant to encourage creative thinking and help children see connections between the stories Jesus told and their own lives. Children make connections based on their life experiences, so you may not immediately see how their picture choices relate to the parable. That is okay. Trust that God is at work in each child.

supplies

- Bible
- *Shine On: A Story Bible*
- Primary leaflets

storytelling props

- Mustard seeds
- Packet of yeast
- Solid-color cloth
- Loaf of bread
- Bird's nest (optional)

poster pack

- Parables poster

to do

- Post the Parables poster from the poster pack.

explore

CREATE

A little bit of yeast can spread through the whole batch of dough and leaven it, just as God's kingdom can spread throughout the whole world. Children can illustrate this with play dough. Give each child some uncolored play dough, and a little bit that is colored. They can mix the two together until all of the play dough is colored. Then they can create something with their dough, such as loaves of bread or a mustard tree.

supplies

- Uncolored play dough (recipe at www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras)
- Colored play dough

LEAFLET

Follow the instructions on page 3 of the Primary leaflet to make "growing seed" pictures. Children should draw first, glue on the birds and nests next, and finish by cutting and folding the scene. *Tip:* For ease of folding, place the birds and nests so they don't cover the dotted fold lines.

supplies

- Primary leaflets
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Crayons or markers

other ideas

- Read "God's kingdom on the rise" on page 1 in the leaflet. Follow the instructions to do the movements as you read.
- Sing "Come to Eat!" to the tune of "Skip to My Lou." Lyrics can be found at www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras.

DISCOVER

Explore yeast together as a way to understand Jesus' parable. Open a packet of yeast and pour the yeast into a resealable plastic bag. Let the children look at the yeast with a magnifying glass. Open a second packet and pour it into a second bag. Add 2–3 T / 30–45 ml of warm water and 1 t / 5 ml sugar. Set the bag in a warm spot for a few minutes. Ask the children what they think will happen. While you are waiting, record your first observations on page 2 of the Primary leaflet. Then take another look at the bag and the yeast. What changed? Record your next observations in the second part of page 2.

supplies

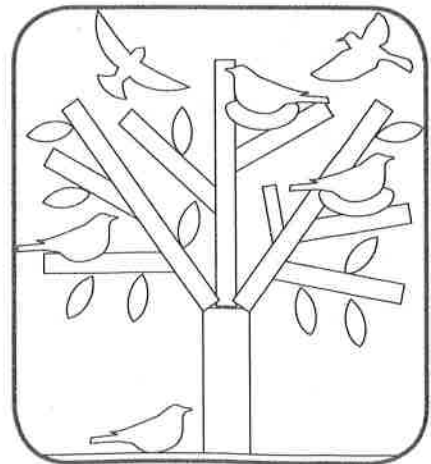
- Primary leaflets
- Two packets of yeast
- Two resealable plastic bags
- Measuring spoons
- Warm water
- Sugar
- Magnifying glass

RETELL

Before the session, cut out a variety of felt birds, nests, and leaves using the Felt templates on pages 98–99 in this guide. Use multiple colors. Cut a large supply of felt rectangles (thick and thin) to be the trunk and branches of the tree. Small circles can be seeds or bird eggs. During the session, lay a large piece of felt on the table as a backdrop. Children can lay the pre-cut felt shapes on the backdrop to create a story scene.

supplies

- Large felt backdrop
- Felt templates (from Additional resources)
- Felt shapes (birds, nests, seeds, eggs, tree trunk and branches, leaves)



bless

PRAY

Bring the group back together and lead them in a prayer:

Thank you, God, that we can be part of your kingdom. Help us to share your love with others this week. Amen.

SEND

Sing "Sizohamba Naye" (We Will Walk with God) (track 18, page 27 in the *Year Two Songbook*).

Give each child a seed. Say:

Each time you follow God's ways, you are planting a seed. Every loving, kind, and peaceful thing you do this week will help God's kingdom to grow. Go in God's peace.

Make sure to send leaflets home with the children.

supplies

- Primary leaflets
- *Shine Songbook and CD*
- *Year Two Songbooks* (optional)
- CD player
- Seeds



God uses those who are considered weak and powerless to serve as living signposts to God's kingdom.

—Steve Sider
Waterloo, Ontario

leader's closing prayer

You are planting seeds in the lives of these children. You may never know what word or act of love will grow into strong trees.

Thank you, God, for making me part of your work, a teller of Bible stories, a planter of seeds, a mixer of yeast. Cause the seeds to grow and the bread to rise. Amen.