

Every step we take can be part of our faith journey. Everything we do can be a building block of faith. When we go through our daily routine, whatever we do, it can involve God. When we go to school or work or to a doctor’s appointment—everything fits into the faith journey. We can reflect God’s grace in the way we interact with others. We can smile, say something kind, or see the world through another person’s eyes. When we do, we share God’s love. That love plants a seed. That seed can grow into something big.

These small things are fragile by themselves. If our entire faith rested on them, we would have a fragile faith. It does not. It builds. And, each faith step contributes to knowing God better and growing stronger on our journey. God is the “ground of our being”¹—the basis of everything we do. Each fragile act comes together with the others, and they form the tapestry of our faith journey. Together, they grow and our lives become a reflection of God’s love and light. It continues throughout life. Regardless of whether someone is a Christian from the cradle roll or a brand-new believer, the faith journey continues throughout life. We can all always grow in Christ and learn something new.

Too often, we have this image of God as the *wholly other*, this inexpressible thing that is beyond our comprehension. Karl Barth refers to God as “a Wholly Other majestic and unobservable unity...”² Barth is, perhaps, the greatest theologian of the twentieth century. Yet, his definition misses the intimacy Jesus shares with his followers. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus spends time with people, he talks with them, and he shares everyday life with them. In this passage, we see him trying to help his listeners understand God. He says, “The kingdom of heaven is like...” Then, he talks about things with which they are completely familiar. He says it five times, if we include 13:44-47, using mundane examples.

They all knew about the mustard shrub. Jesus speaks to their active imagination. They knew how small its seeds were. They knew how it grew. And, they knew how big it was. Likewise, they knew about yeast. They knew how to get it: let a small portion of old bread sit; let it spoil. If they do not wait long enough, it is useless. If they wait long enough, yeast forms and they can make bread. If they wait too long, it ruins the bread and will make people sick. Jesus relates on familiar territory.

Barth is right about not being able to describe God, yet he understands the movement of the Holy Spirit. He understands that God is active in everyday life. He understands that faith is a journey. This is a journey where God still speaks and can relate to us in a variety of ways. Barth talks about the ways God can speak. Following Jesus’ example, Barth uses some common references—things his readers would be familiar with and might find a bit shocking. This was the 1930s, and he wrote,

God may speak to us through Russian Communism, a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub, or a dead dog. We do well to listen...if [God] really does.³

In Matthew, we find a sower, weeds, wheat, mustard seeds, and yeast. In Barth, there is Russian communism, a concerto, a shrub, or even a dead dog. God *can* speak from anything. We could add to the list many examples from our experiences or simply by looking at the world around us. Jesus spoke in parables to explain the unexplainable. If we look at the parables of life around us, we can see God at work, and our faith will grow.

The Gospel of Matthew records five of Jesus' discourses. These show Jesus teaching with authority. The first is the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). The second is the instruction Jesus provides the twelve in Matthew 10. This passage is from the third one. These are kingdom of heaven parables. Jesus is telling his listener's what God's kingdom is like. *It starts small and grows big*. This goes against the grain of popular thought.

In our society, we celebrate the big and powerful and cast aside the meek and mild. The small things, like the metaphorical mustard seed and yeast, are disposable. We want to hear from the rich and powerful, people with high positions. If I said, "My buddy Paul said, 'Creation is a space filled with love and joy'", you might think, *that's nice*. But, if I said, "Paul Fiddes, Professor of Divinity for the University of Oxford, wrote in *Seeing the World and Knowing God*, 'Creation is a space filled with love and joy'", you might say, *what did he mean?*⁴ Power, influence, and position carry weight. Essentially, Fiddes argues that we do not have to put our faith in these things. We can put it in God. This reading, nestled between the parable of the weeds among the wheat and its explanation, turns power on its head.

These parables subvert the conventions and norms we associate with God and the world. When Jesus speaks in familiar words, using familiar experiences, he invites us to use familiar, everyday experiences to express our faith.

Marcelino was a poor, illiterate fishing person from the Solentiname Islands on the southern end of Lake Nicaragua. He describes this reading from Matthew,

I don't know about the mustard seed, but I do know about the *guasima* seed, which is tiny. I'm looking at the *guasima* tree over there. It's very large, and the birds come to it too. I say to myself: that's what we are, this little community, a *guasima* seed.⁵

Marcelino might not be a great theologian, like Karl Barth or Paul Fiddes, but he captures the essence of Jesus' message. "I'm looking at the *guasima* tree over there." Here, we gather in our beautiful sanctuary. What is familiar that we can use to express our faith? One of Marcelino's friends, Manuel, describes the faith journey as follows: "At first it seems insignificant... but afterwards it grows... this tree is the transformation of the world."⁶ The tree of faith can transform the world and we get to be part of it. Regardless of where we are or what we have been through, faith is that little grain that can take root and change our lives and the lives of those around us.

What does the future hold for us? What happens next? At this moment, there is a lot of hatred in the world. There is a lot of darkness. And, we need to be a light shining in the

darkness. We are called to demonstrate that seed of faith that is growing inside of us. God calls us to show it to the world. These opportunities exist every single day. I pray that you will join me in seeking them out.

Together, we can find ways for our faith to grow. As it does, our faith becomes a large tree. Others can come and find rest. They can grow. Our faith can nurture their faith. As the journey continues, "this tree is the transformation of the world."

¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: Reason and Revelation, Being and God* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 110.

² Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 452.

³ Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. I/1, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936/1975), 55.

⁴ Paul Fiddes, *Seeing the World and Knowing God: Hebrew Wisdom and Christian Doctrine in a Late-Modern Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 264.

⁵ Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname, Volume 2*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978), 54.

⁶ Cardenal, 51.