

Sermon July 26, 2026 Rev. Bill Van Oss

I must confess that I don't remember most of the lectures I listened to when I was in seminary almost 40 years ago. But I do remember one from my very first year. I remember it vividly. It was delivered by a brilliant New Testament professor, Fr. Gorman. He was typically late for class, and this was a typical day. He came barging into the classroom looking a bit disheveled and harried, and he immediately began proclaiming "the kingdom, the kingdom, the kingdom." He wrote it in big letters on the blackboard: The Kingdom.

"The kingdom is what it's all about. It's what Jesus was all about. He came to proclaim and to usher in the Kingdom of God." Fr. Gorman went on to explain that the kingdom is "already" and "not yet."

I had only ever thought of the Kingdom as "not yet." The Kingdom of Heaven, the life beyond this one. Life with God in a place a million miles away: streets paved with gold, angels dancing on clouds, a giant gilded room with a bearded old man sitting on a throne. I had only ever imagined the "not yet" kingdom in the next life.

But Jesus makes it clear that the kingdom is already here and now. In teaching about God's kingdom in today's Gospel, Jesus uses images like a tiny mustard seed, yeast carefully kneaded into dough, treasure hidden in a field, a pearl of great price and a net thrown into the sea that collects all kinds of things.

Jesus uses common, earthly images and practices to point to the kingdom of God come near, come here. The kingdom that is already present and active in our midst.

It comes in small ways, through small things, like a tiny mustard seed. It is present everywhere like the yeast that the woman kneaded into three measures of flour. Three measures! That's more than 50 pounds of flour! That's a lot of bread, more than she'd need to feed her family. She could feed the whole town. The kingdom is extravagant abundance.

And precious. Valuable. A treasure worthy of selling all you have so you can buy it. A pearl of such value that you'll give up everything else. The kingdom reshapes our priorities and is prized about all else. It is present and precious and worth sacrificing everything for. It has ultimate value.

The kingdom, the kingdom, the kingdom! I can hear Fr. Gorman shouting it. Already and not yet. Jesus points to signs of the kingdom breaking in through the ordinary – ordinary things and ordinary people.

So how is the kingdom breaking into our world today?

We had a group of teenagers and their adult leaders come here to St. Michael's to help us out after Ian. They worked long days cleaning up, mucking out and repairing things for folks around the island. Some of them led a Vacation Bible School and did jobs around the church.

The final day they were here, we had them all come together in the Gathering Place for a prayer service that included a video. It showed the devastation after the storm and all the people who jumped in to help: first responders, clean up crews, volunteers mucking out houses and removing drywall, people serving meals, handing out water.

When the video was finished, my comment was simple: "never underestimate the power of human kindness to lift up to heal and to unite people. The kingdom comes when people help a neighbor, help a stranger."

Seeming small acts of kindness, mustard seeds, yeast, that grow and spread and feed and heal and connect. We keep at it, spreading seed, kneading dough. Witnessing to the power of compassion, and mercy, justice, peace and love. Witnessing to kingdom values so that God's kingdom might come on earth as it is in heaven.

Reaching out to people in need, standing up for the outcast and marginalized, doing what we can to make this world more peaceful, just and loving as Jesus did.

Sr. Joan Chittiser tells about a time in her life when she was driving from Cleveland to Erie several times a week. It's a long straight road. Each day she'd see a man on the side of the road on the edge of a cornfield.

Sitting on his camp chair, he had a flag in one hand and a sign in the other. He wore army fatigues and had braces on his legs. In one hand he held a homemade flag with a peace sign on it. In the other hand he held a sign that said simply: "Give peace a chance."

Day after day, trip after trip, she'd see him out there. In rain and sleet, hot sun and wind, there he was, alone, quiet, keeping watch, promoting peace.

About the experience, she wrote:

"He as just one man with one small peace sign standing on an empty road waving a homemade flagpole back and forth at every car that passed.

In my mind, that single man, a veteran I presume, goes on waving every day of my life. It was his persistence, his dogged refusal to give up waving, his single-minded commitment to changing the world that got me.

When all is said and done, "persistence" is the antidote to powerlessness. When I refuse to go on waving, when I pick myself up and leave the field, I have given in. I have surrendered my soul to forces whose only argument is that doing what is wrong is better than doing something else.

In the end, the sight of goodness undeterred has more power than all the forces on earth arrayed against it."

Seeds of the kingdom – kingdom values – sown with patience and persistence have the power grow and make the Kingdom of God come near. Amen