

On Earth as it is in Heaven
Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

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Last summer, Keith and I took a once in a lifetime trip through the Pacific Northwest. When we planned the trip from our home in North Carolina in the fall of 2022, we had no idea that we would move here a year later.

When we planned the trip, we decided we would do everything we could to see it all. We had a grand journey through Oregon and Washington, seeing some of the most stunning and beautiful sights either of us had ever seen: Mt. Rainier, multiple breathtaking waterfalls, Lake Crescent in Olympic National Park, the Pacific Ocean, Haystack Rock where the Goonies discovered One-Eyed Willy's treasure, and Tillamook Creamery where cheese samples are free and plenty, because free, delicious cheese is a beautiful thing.

Each time we saw one of these things, we were glimpsing some of the best of God's creation. Things we couldn't see anywhere else. We felt we were looking at the kingdom of heaven here on earth, as we gazed upon jaw-dropping, take-your-breath-away scenery.

We began our trip in Portland and the first thing we did was drive about 30 minutes east to see Multnomah falls. It's the tallest waterfall in Oregon at 620 feet tall. It's stunning. It stops you in your tracks and demands that you stare at it and take it all in. If you stand close enough to the railing, you can even feel a cool mist from the falls hit your face, causing you to inhale sharply from the shock of the cold water.

We decided to hike to the upper falls and back down. On the way back down, we were stopped in our tracks by a small wildflower that demanded our attention.

The flower poked out of the moss and dirt, about six inches high, all alone and by itself. It was on a ledge that hit about waist level. The flower was maybe the size of a nickel and there it grew, all by itself in view of the most famous, breath-taking waterfall in the entire state of Oregon.

The flower had a golden center with a few bright pink stamen sticking out. There were five petals, each one white at the center eventually becoming pink at the tips. There were two white veins running the length of each petal and between them a bright speck of magenta.

We later learned that the wildflower is called a western spring beauty. This flower is one of the first flowers to peak its way out of the snow when spring arrives, announcing that winter is finally over. And, it's among the most common of common wildflowers in the mountains here,

but it is every bit as breathtaking and stunning as the waterfall, and every bit a part of God's beautiful creation.

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Like the western spring beauty, mustard seeds are the most common of common seeds. And it is in this most common of common seed and the action of sowing that Jesus tells those gathered and his twelve disciples that the kingdom of heaven are like.

Mustard shrubs are weeds that invade the space of gardens, and yet, someone took one of those seeds and planted it, so that the shrub might grow so birds would have a place to make their nests. The birds needed the mustard shrub, even though most people might see it and pluck it up from the ground to protect the plants growing around it or they may not even notice it and walk by this shrub that has grown up to be the home of birds, where they make their nests, and birth new life.

On earth as it is in heaven.

The kingdom of heaven is all around us, if we are paying attention. It is in the ordinary, mundane, everyday moments of our lives just as much as the jaw-dropping, breathtaking scenic views of mountains, waterfalls, and oceans. The kingdom of heaven is abundantly common.

The kingdom of heaven is all around us, but it also takes work.

Today when we prayed the Lord's Prayer together, we said, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." This is both a petition to God and a commitment to the work. Prayer means nothing if we don't also act. This parable from Jesus calls us to make the kingdom of heaven right here on earth. For a seed to grow, you have to plant it, water it, and make sure it gets enough sunlight.

There was a specific reason for our vacation last summer: a concert. We built our entire trip around seeing The Highwomen at The Gorge. If you don't know, The Gorge is a stunning amphitheater along the Columbia River, and is known as one of the most beautiful outdoor concert venues there is. But, The Gorge, is not why we wanted to go, we went on this whole trip solely because we wanted to see The Highwomen.

If you are not familiar with the group, The Highwomen consists of 4 women who have very successful solo careers in Americana and Country music. These 4 women, noticed that the music of their industry was dominated by men, and there didn't seem to be very much room for women. So, in an ode to the country supergroup the Highwaymen, Brandi Carlile, Amanda Shires, Natalie Hemby, and Marren Morris formed another country supergroup called The Highwomen, to make more space and place for female artists in Americana and Country music.

As we waited for the concert to start, I knew the view of the river with its colorful cliffs and the setting sun were what was supposed to demand my attention. And don't get me wrong, it did! But, I found myself stopped in my tracks by the people I saw around me, and what I saw demanded my attention.

To my left, I saw a young family, the baby was still at breastfeeding age, and was finishing up her dinner while her mom rocked her gently back and forth, and her dad watched them both in awe and love.

To my right, I saw a large group of queer folks, freely expressing who they are, freely being exactly who God created them to be. Knowing they were in a safe space to do so, they were having the time of their lives.

There were children running around, who had kicked off their shoes, and were playing with each other—squealing with laughter as they had races to see who could roll down the grassy hill the fastest.

At one point, Keith and I moved our chairs over for a group when they asked if we could scoot over so they could all sit together, and later they shared their wine with us.

All around me, I saw people from all over, from all walks of life, with different identities and stories, all gathered in this one place—fully accepted for who they are and fully free to be who they are. Joy, laughter, sharing, acceptance, and kindness were abundantly flowing throughout.

Towards the end of the concert, The Highwomen played my favorite song, which we'll sing together after communion. I watched as strangers put their arms around each other, pulling everyone in, and I with tears in my eyes, sang the song "Crowded Table" along with everyone else,

*If we want a garden,
We're gonna have to sow the seed
Plant a little happiness
Let the roots run deep.
If it's love that we give,
Then it's love that we reap.
If we want a garden,
We're gonna have to sow the seed.*

*I want a house with a crowded table
And a place by the fire for everyone
Let us take on the world while we're young and able
And bring us back together when the day is done.*

The door is always open

*Your picture's on my wall
Everyone's a little broken
And everyone belongs
Yeah, everyone belongs.*

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