

Isaiah 25⁶⁻⁸
±700 BC

“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for ALL PEOPLES a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well- aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over ALL PEOPLES, the sheet that is spread over ALL NATIONS; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from ALL FACES, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from ALL THE EARTH, for the LORD has spoken.”

(emphasis added)

Aramaic Targum
on Isaiah 25:6-8
±200 BC

“The Lord of Hosts will make for ALL THE PEOPLES in this mountain a meal; and thought they suppose it is an honor, it will be a shame for them, and great plagues, plagues from which they will be unable to escape, plagues whereby they will come to their end .”

(emphasis added)

Messianic Rule 2¹¹
(Dead Sea Scroll)
Ist Century AD

[The wise, intelligent and perfect men will gather in their ranks with the Messiah]

“The Messiah of Israel shall come *[and offer a rich banquet]* and the chiefs of the clans of Israel shall sit before him each in the order of his dignity....”

[All these ranks are spelled out; first, judges and officers, then chiefs of thousands, then chiefs of fifties, then of tens; finally come the Levites. No disabled people are allowed to dine with the Messiah including those with visible blemishes, nor any blind, deaf, mute or paralyzed Jews permitted.. No imperfect Jews nor any gentiles may to come to the Messiah’s banquet.]

(emphasis added)



A Grain of Mustard Seed

Brassica nigra (black mustard) is an annual weedy plant cultivated for its seeds, which are commonly used as a spice. The plant is believed to be native to the southern Mediterranean region of Europe, and has been cultivated for thousands of years.

From *Koehler's Medicinal-Plants* 1887

Today's Gospel: Saint Mark 4:26-34 [Year B, Proper 6]

✠ JESUS ALSO SAID, 'THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AS IF SOMEONE WOULD SCATTER seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.' He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests [*κατασκηνοῦν kata ske noon, literally, to roost. Here the word has a technical meaning mentioned in the commentary below*] in its shade.' With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples. [© NRSV]

COMMENTARY

Today we see Jesus glorify the traditional teachings of his Faith against the very popular beliefs of his day. The Gospel selection states the traditional belief of Judaism: the generosity of the Messiah will call the birds (all people) to his great banquet, a symbolic promise of the Eucharist Mark's passage is quite clear: everyone is called to κατασκηνοῦν, that is, to roost.¹

The horrendous prejudices of Pre-Messianic Judaism are seen in the two passages to the right of the Isaiah quotation on page 4. Isaiah has seen the salvation of **ALL PEOPLE** in the Messiah. First Century literature, like the popular *Aramaic Targum* (Interpretation) and the Dead Sea Scroll called *The Messianic Rule*, limit the Messiah's Salvation and Grace.

Since few understood Hebrew, Aramaic targums were read in Synagogue after the Hebrew readings. They often so distorted the reading as to make them irrelevant. It would be as if we rewrote Jesus' words to read, *A new commandment I give you: Hate one another!*

¹ The Apocryphal and heretical Gospel of Thomas (discovered in 1945) used a another word which lacks the technical meaning understood in *roost*, which perhaps further underlines why such books as *Thomas* were rejected. See page 3.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
A Very Popular Parable

Not many of the parables are found in three of the Gospels. Today's Gospel selection is actually found *four times*. It's in Mark, Matthew and Luke, and also in the non-Canonical Gospel of Thomas; viz:

The disciples said to Jesus, "Tell us what the Kingdom of Heaven is like." He said to them, "It is like a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds. But when it falls on tilled soil, it produces a great plant and becomes a shelter for birds of the sky." (*Thomas Verse 20*)

There are several possible Hebrew Bible parallels in Daniel 4:10-12, 4:20-22 and Ezekiel 17:22-23, 31:1-9.

Folk Tales

Some folk tales and parables are pan-cultural. Themes of love, betrayal, death and the like are universal and touch the hearts of all people. The popular rags-to-riches tale of Cinderella has wandered far from its Chinese origins. Stories or ballads originally written down by the Italian, Boccaccio (1313 - 1375) have actually been collected in the Southern Appalachians. For your interest here is touching Buddhist story of mustard seeds, in this case *white* mustard seeds. The tale is found in Buddhism's sacred texts.²

Kisa Gotami was the wife of a wealthy man of Savatthi. After losing her only child, Kisa Gotami became desperate and asked if anyone can help her. Her sorrow was so great that many thought she had already lost her mind. Someone told her to meet Buddha. Buddha told her that he would bring the child back to life if she could get white mustard seeds from a family where no-one has died. She desperately went from house to house, but to her disappointment, every house had someone who had died. Finally the realization struck her that there is no house free from death. She returned to the Buddha, who comforted her and preached to her the truth. She was awakened and entered the first stage of *Arhatship*. Eventually, she became an *Arhat*.

[*An arhat is, roughly, a spiritual adept like unto the Buddha.* (Editor)]

Please prepare Saint Mark 4:35 - 41 for next Sunday.

² It of course is most improbable that it has any connection whatsoever to the parables of Jesus