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Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

"The Kingdom of God, the Mustard Seed and the Yeast" Matthew 13: 31-33

The Scripture tells us that the first words Jesus uttered when he began his ministry were, "Repent. The Kingdom of God is at hand."

What is the Kingdom of God?

The Kingdom of God is not a nation or country that God rules. It is not a geographical concept at all. Rather it means God's pure and unbounded love for us. The Kingdom of God is Jesus himself and what he represents.

In today's scripture lesson, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed. The mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds. But it grows to be a tree big enough for birds to make nests in its branches.

Jesus also compares the Kingdom of God to yeast that a housewife mixes in the dough. The yeast makes the dough rise and transforms it into bread.

The people who heard Jesus knew what mustard seeds looked like. They knew what yeast was and what it did.

In other words, the Kingdom of God is experienced here and now in our daily life as a transforming force. Like the mustard seed and the yeast in the dough, it is working in our everyday, mundane life.

If the Kingdom of God is so near to us, why do we miss it?

We miss it, because we do not see the world around us through the eyes of Jesus, but insist on seeing through the eyes of the world.

Often our attention is focused on wealth, self-interest, prestige, power, and pride. We often lose the direction of life. But if we put on Jesus' glasses and see our life through them, we find God's grace and mercy right in the midst of us in every situation, in good times and bad times. Then we are empowered, and transformed.

Let's take an example. Recently an earthquake and tsunami devastated Japan, and a hurricane destroyed many towns in the state of Alabama. There was a phenomenon common to Fukushima and Alabama in the aftermath of those devastations. Victimized people were helping each other. Volunteers poured in. Money, food and medicines were donated even from abroad.

People who suffer those calamities say that they have never experienced such love and compassion from so many people who are strangers.

Changing our perspective, seeing things around us through the perspective of love – that is repentance.

We see the Kingdom of God in the midst of us, so close, so near, and so real. Jesus' calling is ringing clear. "Repent. The Kingdom of God is at hand."

Jesus said elsewhere, "Seek first the Kingdom of God." (Matthew 6: 33.) "Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened." (Matthew 7: 7.)

That is, we are to cooperate with him. We are to participate in his work. We are to grow in love. We are to let Jesus transform us. We are to be humble instruments of Almighty God day in and day out.

"Repent. The Kingdom of God is at hand."

Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed.