

## Dandelions and the Kingdom of God

© August 4, 1999 Catherine M. Wallace  
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Matt. 13: 31-33, 44-52.

With some apologies to the translators of the Gospel of Matthew, I want to explain that the kingdom of God is like a dandelion. Dandelion seeds are puffy little things. Toddlers blow them loose on the breeze. But then . . . Then they land and sprout, then they root and grow, taproots deep in the earth. Before you know it, they're as tall as trees, so big that birds nest in them. And the neighbors notice. They make little suggestions about Weed-B-Gon, they make corny jokes, just to make sure we know they noticed all the dandelions in the lawn. We pick the flowers furtively, when we think no one is looking, trying getting rid of those bright yellow flowers. The kingdom of God is like dandelions disrupting the green sweep of a perfect lawn, disrupting our plans for the landscapes of our lives. And there is no Weed-B-Gon for God.

And the kingdom of God is like information that an investment analyst discovers. He says nothing to anyone. He sells his house, he sells his car. He cashes in his life insurance, his IRAs, his CDs, his 401k. He sells all his mutual funds. And he takes all that money, and he invests what he discovered. That is what God is like in our lives. God is the discovery, God is the key piece of data that will upend all our prior investments. God will swamp all of our ordinary priorities. What would it take to swamp all *your* ordinary priorities? What hope do *you* have for your life that might have that kind of power?

And the kingdom of God is like one red sock. A new red sock, still full of red dye, wet and hidden up out of sight, up under the rim of the washing machine. And it turns the whole next load of wash a blotchy, streaky pink, a whole load of white shirts looking like they have some sort of rash. Like a red sock, God is subversive in crazy, unexpected ways. We think our priorities will never be

swamped; we think we are in control. But we underestimate God. All the time, Jesus argues, people underestimate God. We expect God to be remote and dignified, to be rational and predictable. We never expect that God can be a sleazy underhanded screwball. But God can be like a red sock turning the whole wash pink. God has a very dangerous sense of humor, aimed squarely at all our grandiose pretensions.

We work very hard, most of us, most of the time, to keep the kingdom of God from disrupting our lives in all these ways. Despite an extravagant God, we struggle to be prudent. Despite a wildly generous God, we struggle to keep track of all our debts and all our debtors. We see our lives as a problem in management, as a problem to be solved, and not as an exuberant gift. And because we look at our lives as a problem in management, we lie awake at night worrying that our best solutions don't usually work very well.

So try this. Imagine what might happen if we took our list of favorite worries, if we took the list of our most persistent anxieties and our most familiar self-doubts, and we called the whole lot of it, "sin"? What if "sin" named the fears that haunt us, what if "sin" named the nameless guilt that wakes us up in the middle of the night? Pray to be delivered from these temptations. Pray to be delivered from the temptations of terror, from the temptations of our own exaggerated expectations. Pray for liberation from the tyranny success and status, which is to say the tyranny of worries and doubts. Pray to admit that we are not in control, pray to discover and to trust the kingdom of God. Pray to discover and to trust the generosity of God.

But first let me warn you. I've tried this, and it's nasty stuff. If every time we start to feel frazzled we begin to pray "deliver us from temptation," soon enough we discover how addicted we are to our anxieties, to our frustrations, and to our fears of failure. Yes indeed. We are addicted because all these fears and doubts generate our list of good excuses. And we need every one of our good excuses, because they protect us from seeing how we might change our lives. They protect us from asking--seriously--what God is calling us to do and to be.

Praying "thy kingdom come" is very dangerous stuff. Unlike the man in the parable, we are afraid to invest too much in the idea that God might be real.

These little stories offer no more than a hint, really, of what God's reality might mean in your life. But if God take root in your mind and in your heart, who knows what will happen. Extravagant things. Dandelions like oak trees, yellow flowers shading your roof, and the peace of Christ, which surpasses all human understanding.