

The birds made nest in its branches

By [David Lewicki](#)

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I shared today in church a few of parables from Matthew 13: mustard seed, yeast, treasure, pearl. I tried to just tell them as stories. Very little editorial commentary or explanation. Just the stories. Here's an example:

"The kingdom of heaven is like when a person...

...takes the tiniest of all seeds, a seed so small that if I had one on my finger you could barely see it.

The person puts the tiny seed in the ground, and it begins...

...to grow. It grew and grew into a large shrub.

It was not a majestic cedar. It was not a fruit-bearing fig. Really, it was a big weed.

And the birds of the air came...and they made their nests there."

The technique is borrowed from [Godly Play](#), a well-known church school curriculum for young children. I love the sparseness of and the open-ended-ness of this kind of story telling, especially for these bizarre and complicated parables.

A friend offered that because of this mode of presentation, he heard these stories in a new way today--he heard how *disappointing* these parables are. If the kingdom of God is supposed to be something that we long for, these parables don't necessary nurture the appetite. Maybe better put, they aren't "typical" visions of reward: there is loss in each vision--sometimes profound loss.

The downside of trying something like this is that when you do something new, it can throw a congregation out-of-balance. I can't emphasize enough how much the expectations an audience brings with them shape what a performer/preacher can do. Imagine if you sat down to watch Glee, and you got a cop drama. It doesn't matter how good the cop drama is, you're ticked that it's not what you expected. I imagine there was a bit of that going on today, too. And add to that that when the

preacher/performer does something new, you aren't as polished in the new idiom.

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