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Good morning. Thank you so much for having me here today. Earlier this year when I discovered there was a group of Mennonite youth coming to camp from Montreal, I was excited. I knew this was a connection I wanted to nurture and even more so after I met the great people who came from here to Fraser this summer. I had a wonderful time meeting with the youth yesterday and having conversations about camp - my favourite topic to discuss. I think it always has been and probably always will be. So again, thank you for welcoming me here and for showing an interest in Fraser Lake Camp.

As you know today marks the first Sunday of advent. The beginning of hope and anticipation for the coming of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. While Jesus walked the earth he talked a lot about the Kingdom of God. My favourite way that Jesus presented his ideas and teachings were through his parables. Even though they were often confusing to the people who heard them first hand, and can still be confusing today even after much study has been done of their meaning and purpose, I love that they require us to do the work and the figuring out. Jesus expected people to ask questions and figure out what these stories meant in relation to their lives. This is a way of teaching that we try to mirror at camp.

There are three parables that teach us about the Kingdom of God that stand out to me. The parable of the great banquet, the parable of the mustard seed, and the parable of the yeast. These three stories that Jesus told really resonate with me in connection to camp and how camp builds people up and allows them to further God's kingdom on earth. During the advent season, it is the kingdom that we anticipate and hope for.

I want to take a look at each of these three parables and tell you some stories of my own from a camp perspective.

First let's hear the parable of the great banquet. (Jonah)

**YOUTH READS PARABLE OF THE GREAT BANQUET**

Jesus is quite clear through the telling of this parable that everyone is welcome in the Kingdom of heaven on earth. No matter who you are, or who your parents are, or what job you have, or where you live, or how able bodied you are; you are invited to the feast. This is one of my favourite things about Fraser Lake. Everyone is invited. Everyone is welcome. From the very beginning in 1955 when

Fraser was simply the dream of Emmerson McDowell, and others, this was what they envisioned. A place where any child or youth could come and explore themselves and God in a natural setting. This coming year marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Fraser Lake Camp, and the mission remains the same. We are welcoming in people from all walks of life and we're building community. As a result this creates peace, and acceptance, and understanding in our world. Furthering God's kingdom.

In the late 1980's and through the 90's I was privileged to attend Fraser Lake as a camper and staff member. I lived for camp. During the fall, winter, and spring months of the year I couldn't wait to go back to Fraser. For many, camp is referred to as a second home, but for me, when I drove in that laneway past the Fraser Lake sign and the towering pine trees I felt I had arrived back home, leaving my second home behind. I loved Fraser for a million reasons, but one of the things I am most thankful for from my experience as a child and youth at Fraser is the diversity that I experienced. Although I didn't know it at the time. I would have never named diversity as something I loved about camp. It's only now as an adult that I look back on my time at Fraser and realize and appreciate this experience that I had. Living in diversity at camp has shaped who I am as a person. My acceptance and interest in people who are very different from myself are the result of building community at camp with kids who came from very different lives than I did. I was a little Mennonite kid from Waterloo county and when I arrived at camp and met my cabin mates from big cities in Ontario, like Toronto and Ottawa, I didn't think anything of the differences we had. It didn't seem out of the ordinary to me. I met kids who were in foster care, kids who had never gone to church before, kids with a different colour of skin than me, and also kids who were kind of like me, but not necessarily Mennonite. But we all became fast friends. We swam together, ate together, sang together, and our counsellors walked with us as we worked out conflicts together. We were a little community. And so were all of the other cabin groups. And together we created one large community as we learned about each other and how to live together. I truly believe that this is what God wants for his people. Just as Jesus describes in the parable of the great banquet; he wants people from the streets and the alleys and the country lanes to come to His banquet. And this is what Fraser Lake does. It is one of our greatest strengths and always has been. We welcome diversity and as a result are furthering God's kingdom. And whoever comes to Fraser and participates in our program, or supports us financially or through volunteered time, or holds us up in prayer is part of this important work.

I'll now invite (Eleni) up to read the parable of the mustard seed

## **YOUTH READS PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED**

A mustard seed is a tiny little thing, tinier than most seeds. And yet, as Jesus teaches us in this parable, when it is planted and is cared for and nurtured by the sun and the rain, the seed grows into the largest of garden plants. A tree so strong that the birds come and perch in its branches. I love this image. I'll say it again for you. A tree so strong that the birds come and perch in its branches. It reminds me of a quiet early morning at camp where the dew is still on the grass and the sun has just come up to warm the lake, and all you can hear are the birds singing among the branches of the trees. I also appreciate this parable in connection with camp, because our campers *are* those little mustard seeds. They come to us with gifts and talents hidden away that have not yet been nurtured and had the opportunity to bloom.

When I reflect on this past summer and think of all of the kids who came to camp and went home at the end of the week with newfound confidence and skills, there are many stories that come to my mind that I could share. But in the interest of time I will share two stories that are both examples of Jesus' parable of the nurtured mustard seed growing into something great.

The very first week of camp this summer, there was a little girl, we'll call her Angela, who was terrified of going in the lake. On the first day all of Angela's cabin mates and counsellors were at the waterfront taking their swim tests, the rest of the girls having no problem plunging in and doing their laps of the swimming area. Angela was in tears. She was afraid to go in. One of her counsellors sat with her on the dock and soothed her. This counsellor was patient. This counsellor was encouraging. "Angela, let's dip our toes in the water, let's see how it feels." Slowly, Angela dipped her toes in. "Okay, Angela, now let's kick our legs and make splashes." Reluctantly, Angela started to kick and splash. The counsellor then got in the water and gently encouraged Angela bit by bit to come into the water. This went on until Angela was fully immersed and swimming through the water in her life jacket. "I'm swimming! I'm actually doing it! I'm swimming!!!" Anyone who was at the waterfront at that moment will never forget the joy on her face. Through the patience and encouragement of a staff member, this little girl discovered something about herself that she didn't even know she could do. She got in the lake and she swam. And I bet she will never forget it.

My second story is about a senior camper who was unsure of herself when she first arrived at camp. She was shy, didn't make friends easily, and hadn't really found her niche at camp. Until she went to the music activity where campers learn to play

guitar and djembe drums. She instantly took an interest in learning to play the guitar and the counsellor who led this activity challenged her and nurtured her love for music. At the end of the week she even signed up to play a song in our weekly talent show. This was a big deal for her. Something she probably would have never considered doing without the encouragement of the music teacher. At the talent show she got up in front of everyone and played a very simple song, consisting of only one guitar chord, but when she played her last note the whole camp broke out into applause and she was beaming. A smile from ear to ear. You could just see how proud she was of herself.

These two stories that I've shared today reveal what camp and camp staff can do for a child. Through care and nurture these small mustard seeds make personal discoveries and gain confidence in themselves, growing into strong trees. So lovely that the birds of the air sit in their branches and sing. Camp can seem like something small – a week in a child's life. Yet camp experiences have this amazing way of changing and transforming us, building us up and making us new. This is what it's like in the kingdom of god.

I now invite (Hanna) to come and read for us the parable of the yeast.

### **YOUTH READS PARABLE OF THE YEAST**

This parable is short. But it's an important one. Jesus says that simply by adding a small amount of yeast to the flour when baking bread it will spread through the dough and cause the bread to rise. At the same time, aspects of the kingdom of god might seem small and unnoticeable, but yet they spread through our lives and our world, changing and transforming, leavening and rising and making them something entirely new.

Now, I do have a story that fits with this, but as a side note; in discussing my sermon with my husband Bryan, he said, what more do you need to say about bread when relating it to Fraser Lake? No metaphor needed there; the fresh baked bread is one of the best parts of camp! As some of you may know, we do have a baker on site who bakes bread on a regular basis, and this is definitely a camp favourite. The process that goes into baking bread for the entire camp and the fact that we all sit together and enjoy it while building community is something that I really value about the camp and I think it makes Fraser special ☺

Now, back to the metaphors of adding yeast to flour. How does this relate to camp?

This was my first summer as Director of Fraser Lake Camp and when I accepted the job I knew I had some challenges ahead of me. One of those challenges would be to get the staff behind me. I was new and I was going to be changing some aspects of camp to make it a better environment and program. And if you've ever been to camp before you'll know that change is a difficult task. Camp is built on traditions and people hold on to those tightly. I know that I did as a camper and staff member at Fraser! So going into the summer I wasn't sure how these changes would be received. I now want to focus on a couple of staff members who this summer I saw as the camp yeast, so to speak.

First, I'll tell you about a staff member who was a quiet but wise soul. He was an observer. He was well liked by the staff and he did his job well. But he didn't say much. After a couple of weeks into camp some of the staff weren't sure of the changes I had made. This was voiced in a staff meeting and I listened carefully to their concerns. When the room became silent he spoke up. He said, "Change is hard. Especially at camp. But sometimes we need change to grow and to become what we have the potential to be". People listened to this. There is something about advice and encouraging words when they come from someone who usually observes. From this moment forward I noticed the staff doing their best to be open minded. They worked hard to make camp the best it could be. And at the end of the summer I had a number of people thank me for the changes I had implemented. Although they appreciated them in the end, I'm not sure they would have been in a head space to accept these changes if this staff member had not been a voice for change.

Next, I want to mention another staff member who had endless energy and ideas for all areas of camp. Right from the beginning he was excited to be on staff and he was quite vocal about his vision for how to make camp great. He raised the bar for campfires, making every night a challenge to be better than the night before. He got people excited about dressing up and getting into character for camp events. And he was also an excellent example of going above and beyond his job description. He always said, "If you're sitting around with nothing to do, you should be thinking about what you could be doing in that moment to make Fraser a better place." Staff members were excited by his enthusiasm, I was excited by his enthusiasm, and as a result people really got into making camp the best it could be.

These two examples of staff members are different varieties of yeast, but both of them were added to the flour and made the dough rise. They threw in some wisdom and enthusiasm, and also led by example, and this permeated through the staff. In fact, I know we had such a successful summer because of the effort and

care the staff members put into every aspect of camp. This is how Jesus suggests things can be in the kingdom of god. Small, unexpected changes make all of the difference. Peace is spread, community is built, and our lives are changed.

Camp is a special place. It is a place where we can experience the beauty of God's creation. It is a place where a group of diverse, gifted, and enthusiastic leaders care for children as they nurture their talents, take risks, and learn about themselves and about God's love for them. For myself, the Fraser Lake staff, the campers, and everyone involved, camp is a place where we build peace, form a community, and catch a small glimpse of the Kingdom that Advent anticipates and Jesus promises.

Amen.