

The Mystery of the Mustard Seed

1. Warm-up question: Sunday's sermon began with the story of an elephant who grabbed a lion, bashed him against a couple trees, threw him down, and stomped on him as a reminder that the lion wasn't as powerful as he thought. Tell us about a time recently when life has reminded you of your lack of power.
2. Jesus' Parable of the Mustard Seed is a reminder of how God's power can and will flow into and through us. Read Mark 4:30-32, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. The terms "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" are interchangeable. Jesus used both terms to refer to *any space where God reigns*. Heaven is the ultimate example of the kingdom of God, but Jesus made clear that we can also experience the kingdom in anticipatory ways here on earth. We can encounter the kingdom in the presence of any person, family, workplace, church, or other place where God is allowed to reign. Tell us about a person in whom you have experienced the kingdom of God.
 - b. Jeff said, "Your workplace could conceivably be a manifestation of the kingdom of God if enough people there allow God to reign – and if not, at least your cubicle or workstation or office can be a kingdom outpost in your workplace – a space where people experience God through you." Do you feel your cubicle, workstation, or office is a kingdom outpost? What's something you could do to make your personal workspace even more like the kingdom of God?
3. Jesus said that the kingdom of God "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 in its shade." The point seems to be that, when God is in something, its potential is limitless. God specializes in taking little things and doing something extraordinary with them. Other Bible verses make a similar point.
 - a. In Matthew 17:20, Jesus said, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed . . . , nothing will be impossible for you." What do you think that means?
 - b. In First Corinthians 1:26, the Apostle Paul said, "Consider your own call, brothers and sisters, not many of you were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is lowly and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are." What insights should we draw from this verse?
 - c. In your own life experience, when have you seen God take something little and turn it into something extraordinary?

4. In Sunday's sermon, Jeff invited us to consider what the Parable of the Mustard Seed means for our church and for each of us as individuals. First let's talk about our church. Jeff said, "Our church is a mustard seed." He reminded us that we are far from being a powerful church in the eyes of the world, but asserted that God has big plans for us as a force for reformation in modern Christendom. Jeff said he believes God has raised us up to be an antidote to the sickness that has infected so many churches today and a refuge for many driven away from other churches.
 - a. These days many churches have become characterized by arrogance and aggression. The arrogance manifest itself as "spiritual know-it-all-ism," *i.e.*, we know everything, we've got all the answers, we've got God all figured out. Have you ever encountered this kind of spiritual arrogance? Tell us about it.
 - b. Out of arrogance arises aggression. Whenever someone disagrees with arrogant churches, the church lectures them and makes spiritual threats. Have you ever witnessed this kind of spiritual aggression? Tell us about it.
 - c. Spiritual aggression and arrogance also manifests itself by excluding people. In most churches, if you're transgender, divorced, female, or gay you're excluded from leadership roles. Have you ever experienced that? How did it feel?
 - d. LifeJourney comes from humble beginnings. Our church was founded by a Bible study of 10 "reject" Christians who were ousted from their home churches for being gay. Jeff pictured God looking down in the early days of our church and saying, "Hey, I can use them! Out of that mustard seed Bible study of 10 spiritual rejects, I can forge a congregation that will become a model for what I want the church of the future to be." How might our unique history position our church to be a powerful, positive force for reform in modern Christianity?
 - e. In Jesus' parable, the mustard bush ends up providing a nest place for many birds in need of a home. There are a whole lot of birds, *i.e.*, people, who need to find a spiritual nesting place in a church like ours. Sunday we launched Operation Mustard Seed to invite friends, neighbors, coworkers, and family members. Tell us about someone you know who needs our church. Will you invite them? (If so, fill out the leaf on p. 3 and tape it to the Mustard Tree in the Social Hall.)
5. The Parable of the Mustard Seed also applies to us as individuals. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17:21. If the kingdom is within you, and if the kingdom is like a mustard seed, that means you are a mustard seed. There are no limits to what God could do through you. So keep planting seeds. Keep doing little things God calls you to do because you have no idea what God might do through it.
 - a. Read Richard Halverson's prayer on p. 3. How does that prayer speak to you?
 - b. In your life right now, what's a mustard seed God is calling you to plant and nurture? Are you willing to plant and nurture it?

Mark 4:30-32

30 Jesus said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?' ³¹It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³²yet 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 in its shade.'

Prayer of Rev. Richard Halverson

Wherever you go, God is sending you.
Wherever you are, God has put you there.
God has a purpose in your being right where you are.
Christ, who indwells you by the power of his Spirit,
wants to do something in and through you.
Believe this and go in his grace, his love, his power.
In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Amen

