

The Mustard Seed
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Today we begin a series on Jesus' parables
Parables are stories, usually told orally, that have a moral or a point
Jesus was fond of telling stories and his stories or parables always had multiple points to them

Jesus knew that people remember stories better than anything else

I know that too
Because over the years as I preached here I have noticed that not everyone always pays attention to me and to what I say

Usually at the beginning everyone is looking up at me with rapt attention
But ten minutes in there can be someone sleeping, someone looking around in their purse, people whispering, and that's when I think...
Man...I should have put a story right about here

Because whenever I tell a story...and I often do it at the end of the sermon to pull everyone back together
Every time I tell a story, Once again, I have everyone's attention

And by the way, each Sunday we do a parable which will be for about the next 7 Sundays, we will have it acted out
If you would like to be a part of this see Janet Shaw
I kept the scripture short today (I didn't add any Old Testament text that related to the New Testament text to sort flesh it out more) because in its brevity, its smallness, this scripture packs a punch
Just like the tiniest of mustard seeds

Now as soon as I put this last block on this tower, I am going to continue preaching....(put last block on tower...whole thing falls down) **(IF THERE IS AN IMAGE ON SCREEN THAT CONVEYS THIS ALL THE BETTER)**

Notice...this small thing made the difference between having a tower, and the tower being destroyed. Who would have thought this little piece of wood---could do that?

Now many of you know that in 1997 there was a book that came out called **The Tipping Point**

How many of you have read the “Tipping Point?”

This phrase “tipping point” has become part of our conversation now...its kind of become a colloquialism...often w people will use it and maybe say something like, “Yeah, when my boss yelled at me again, that was the tipping point for me, to quit”

The gist of the book The Tipping Point is that sometimes the smallest things that have happened in history have made all the difference in the way things are today.

The smallest events, ideas, conceptions can go viral under the right conditions

In fact the subtitle of the Tipping Point is this: ***How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference***

Gladwell, the author, writes that “a small idea spreads like wildfire, once it reaches the tipping point”

It’s the point of critical mass, where your idea goes from interesting to a few people, to a must-have for everyone.

Much like Jesus’ proverbial mustard seed, planted at the right time, in the right conditions that mustard seed grows into an enormous tree, full of branches and roots and leaves and creates more mustard seeds.

At the right time and at the right season, it just takes off

But, as the image on the screen portrays today, it is so very small to begin with...(show image of hand holding small seed)

Still as the Bible and Gladwell tell ussmall things make a big difference.

And what I want to emphasize this morning is never ever underestimate the power of a small seed of faith.

In 1963, Israeli archeologists excavated Herod the Great's palace. Layer after layer of history was removed. They found skeletal remains, ancient artifacts, but the most curious find was a sealed jar with seeds preserved inside it.

Radio carbon dating gave them an age range between 155 BC and 64 AD so somewhere in the vicinity of 2,000 years old and they figured out that they belonged to an extinct species of tree called the Judean Date Palm.

Those seeds were put in storage for 40 years at a university in Jerusalem. But in 2005, three seeds were planted in the desert. Eight weeks later, one of those seeds sprouted, making it **The oldest seed to be successfully germinated!**

So they called it **Methuselah** after the oldest person in the Bible. **(AN IMAGE OF TREE?)**

By 2008, that one seed had grown into a five foot tree with a dozen leaves that flowered for the first time in 2011 and this year it measured at 10 feet tall and produces pollen.

Now, in the field of botany, there are two categories of seed, orthodox and unorthodox. **What sets an orthodox seed apart is its ability to survive.** An unorthodox seed can't survive below about 10 degrees Celsius but an orthodox seed can survive droughts and glaciers and centuries just like the Methuselah seed.

The mustard seed of faith is an orthodox seed.

It survives no matter what. It survives persecution, drought, famine, generations of time.

It survives when no one thinks it will. And at the right time, and at the right season under the right conditions as God ordains...you will see it flourish.

That mustard seed of faith can survive any and every circumstance. You can't kill it.

Even when you die, the mustard seed of faith that you have planted does not. Long after you are long gone, your seeds of faith will impact generations.

Now a little bit more about mustard seeds...

A mustard seed comes in a few varieties, black, white, yellow. (IMAGE?) But regardless of the color, the size is about two millimeters. We are talking about the smallest garden seed in Biblical culture.

That little seed is packed with vitamin B6, B12, C, E and K as well as calcium, magnesium, sodium, potassium, iron and zinc, just to name a few.

And then it becomes a key ingredient in mustard. It doesn't matter if it is French's classic yellow, Gauden's spicy brown, or Grey Poupon, (PICS OF MUSTARD?)

It is the key ingredient in this wonderful condiment! What would we do with our hot dogs without mustard?

But if you didn't know what that seed was you would have no earthly idea what it could become. **That is faith!** We have no idea what our efforts, however small, can become, when germinated in the name of Jesus. When caused to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit. But we do small things with great love anyway!!

And I know that I often underestimate the God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine and who uses the small things of the world to confound the mighty.

In our responsive reading this morning we were reminded of God coming as a tiny baby,

to a tiny village no one had heard of – Nazareth,

using peasants as parents,

uneducated fishermen as disciples,

speaking most often to people who were below the poverty line,

using a cross that was considered a curse, a borrowed tomb –

All of these things considered small by world's standards and easy to overlook – it's those things that have sprouted and grown and created this grace based gospel, and incredible faith community called Christianity

That's how God works...I forget it all the time but its true - God is a God of the mustard seed...

Who uses our efforts...our small seeds of faith that we plant, for his glory

I can get discouraged because I am not always believing that anything will come of my small efforts...yet Jesus tells us in this parable that those small mustard seeds of faith make all the difference.

They are Tipping Points for the gospel.

The mustard seed of faith...as small as it is....its an orthodox seed. Nothing kills it.

And it will blossom and flourish at the right time...it will last for generations upon generations...

Did you ever notice in Scripture that God is a God of the generations...he always says, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob..."

Some of you are teaching your children and grandchildren about the Lord. Sometimes you wonder...do they get this? Does bringing them to church even matter? Does anything I say really take root?

Believe me, that mustard seed of faith that you are planting in them will be a tipping point for generations to come...cause the mustard seed of the gospel is an orthodox seed...nothing can kill it...

Long after you and I are gone the small things that you have done to tell the next generation about Jesus will continue to live on.

Like the very prosperous businessman who told me, "*The only reason I am here today in church is because my grandmother used to sing to me the song 'Jesus loves me this I know' and it was the only time I ever felt God's love. I want to know that love again and that's why I am here.'*

A mustard seed of a little child's song of faith, taking root, and flourishing? I doubt that grandmother had any idea that her singing to her young grandson would bring him back to God one day. (IMAGE?)

Some of you have volunteered to go on the Rancho Santa Marta Mission trip.

And you wonder, do my small efforts make a difference?

Does my digging a ditch, hammering nails, doing kid activities, being in community with a different culture...does it really matter? Does it make an impact...after all I am only there for 5 full days. It's a mustard seed of my time.

I was in a restaurant a couple months ago and a man came up to me with a big smile, and at first I didn't recognize him.

Then I realized he had been a participant with us in one of our first trips there – I think we only had about 15 people that year. He warmly shook my hand and said to me, (IMAGE)

“I just want to thank you for that RSM trip years ago. We joined your group, my son and I, from another church, and the experience brought our faith back to life. We had been going through some very trying times, and RSM was pivotal for us beginning to go in a new direction and receive healing.”

Sometimes our mission trips help *us*, more than anyone!

The smallest of mustard seeds – a tipping point in someone’s life.

Never be discouraged. Some of you can’t do much anymore...but you can pray. Thank you for those prayers. God will use them.

Some of you are extremely busy, but you are here this morning... Some of you are making an effort to reach out to our Onnuri partners, some of you are doing prison ministry, some of you are supporting missions and feeding the homeless every month...

These are the mustard seeds of faith that are the tipping points for the gospel and they matter more than you can ever know – and what you do in this way will never die.

The mustard seed of the gospel, planted in faith is an orthodox seed. A seed that never dies, but continues to flourish, give life, and spread the gospel from generation to generation.

I want to close with a personal story. I would not be a pastor if it hadn’t been for a tipping point moment that happened way before I was born.

My grandfather was very poor growing up. His parents had immigrated from Italy to the US and they lived in poverty. He was the only one in his family to get a higher education degree – a Master of Divinity, and then later an honorary doctorate.

Through a series of events, when he was about 29 – (he was already married and had a child – he’d been in the insurance business and very succesful) he felt a call to the ministry.

And it was a clear calling from God...But his going to seminary at that time would have meant a huge financial sacrifice for my grandmother. They already had one son and she was pregnant with my Mom. She would have to work, they would have to move, and my grandfather would also have to work nights and study during the day...so she would rarely see him.

So my grandfather told the Lord he couldn't follow this calling; it would be too hard on his family. But he did lay out a fleece. He said Lord, my wife is in the living room. *If I go in there, and she brings this up, on her own accord, about my going to seminary, if she has a change of heart and agrees with this (because she was adamant that this idea was not a good one), and if this happens tonight, then I will go.*

From my grandmother's perspective, she told me that she knew my grandfather had this call on his life, but she was denying it. She would see him pause at every church building and read the signs, even when they were driving by. However, she had been resisting it because she knew too what a sacrifice it would mean. They had even had fights about it. But as my grandfather was laying out this fleece, she was having an experience of God speaking directly to her.

At the moment my grandfather walked into the living room my grandmother turned to him and said, "I know you are called to go to into the ministry, and I want you to know that I support you and that I will stand by you all the way."

That decision, as difficult as it was, became the tipping point for generations to come, as my grandfather, his son, and me all became pastors. The happiest moments I had in my childhood were at my grandfather's church growing up with wonderful people being kind to me and teaching me about Jesus.

I doubt my grandmother had any idea that her willingness to say a simple YES to the Lord, make a small decision on that day, would have this ripple effect down through the generations.

Never underestimate the mustard seed.

The mustard seed of faith is an orthodox seed; – it keeps on keeping on in the name Jesus – and what you do for the Lord no matter how small will never die. AMEN