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Mark 4:26-34

Seeds…

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Mark 4:26-34 Common English Bible

Then Jesus said, “This is what God’s kingdom is like. It’s as though someone scatters seed on the ground, then sleeps and wakes night and day. The seed sprouts and grows, but the farmer doesn’t know how.  The earth produces crops all by itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full head of grain. Whenever the crop is ready, the farmer goes out to cut the grain because it’s harvesttime.” He continued, “What’s a good image for God’s kingdom? What parable can I use to explain it? Consider a mustard seed. When scattered on the ground, it’s the smallest of all the seeds on the earth; but when it’s planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all vegetable plants. It produces such large branches that the birds in the sky are able to nest in its shade.” With many such parables he continued to give them the word, as much as they were able to hear. He spoke to them only in parables, then explained everything to his disciples when he was alone with them.

Have you ever seen the giant sequoia trees in California? The cone of the sequoia is 3 inches long and grows into something huge. It can take 54 people, holding hands, to stand in a circle around the trunk of a giant sequoia tree.

Jesus taught using parables and he used everyday agricultural language to talk about God. He used language that everyone would understand. So, he talks about someone scattering seeds and watching them grow. If you have ever planted a vegetable garden, you know how amazing it is to watch how the seeds come up, begin to grow, and produce a harvest. We don’t know exactly why it grows or how it grows, but the earth produces the harvest and we are able to reap what has been created[[1]](#footnote-2).

Jesus talks about a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds on earth. But from that smallest seed, the mustard bush becomes one of the greatest of all shrubs. We learn from these two stories that there is mystery with God. God works in God’s own way and in God’s own timing. And may we never forget that God is still at work.

Our mission focus for 2015 at Greenland Hills is hunger relief. Last week our Communion offering was for the North Texas Food Bank where every dollar provides three meals to hungry North Texans. This family of faith provided 468 meals for our neighbors. An offering that may have felt small and insignificant to you, was able to provide so much. This week I visited Dana Allen who is the wife of Jeffrey Allen and mom to Teal Allen. Dana needs a heart transplant and has just been moved to a rehab facility after 13 weeks in the hospital because she was able to get a heart pump until she is able to get a new heart. Visiting Dana brought me, and hopefully her, such joy. I prayed with Chris Mims this week and again it brought me, and hopefully Chris, and his family, such peace. I have to share with you what Chris asked that we pray for. He asked that we pray that everyone in the world will accept that they are a child of God and then go treat their neighbor as a child of God. And then, in Chris’ words, rub all of that love around like peanut butter.

We Methodists have always had a desire to have a connection with a higher power and we have felt compelled to take care of each other. This week we all watched the video in McKinney of Dajerria Becton and Officer Eric Casebolt. My heart ached. My heart ached for the police who go into harm’s way each and every day and then there are days like yesterday when harm comes to their doorstep with the bombings at police headquarters here in Dallas. My heart ached for Dajerria, my heart ached for the other children who saw Officer Eric Casebolt’s actions and will now have doubts about the police.

My heart breaks for Kalief Browder who was accused at 16 of stealing a backpack and spent three years at Rikers, two of them in solitary confinement, waiting for a trial. At Rikers as of late March over 400 people had been locked up for more than 2 years without being convicted of a crime. And there are 6 people at Rikers who have been waiting on pending cases for more than 6 years.[[2]](#footnote-3)

May we be a witness for justice and peace with our actions and with our words. And may we know that anytime we hear a remark that is racist in nature, if it goes unchallenged, we become a willing participant. We need to say time out, is there a better way to say that? Because what is at stake is how we live in community with people who look differently than we do. We may have come a long way in civil rights but we still haven’t changed hearts. We have to be friends with someone whose skin color looks differently than yours. And we are going to act our way into a new way of thinking.

We live in a broken world, but God has work for us to do. May we express our support for the police in their difficult jobs. May we strongly condemn violence, and may we pray for racial reconciliation and healing. Mark Miller was the musician while we were at Annual Conference and we sang one of the songs that our choir has sang before here at Greenland Hills. The words are “I believe in the sun, even when it’s not shining. I believe in love, even when I don’t feel it. I believe in God, even when God is silent.” Mark shared that the words of that anthem were found left on the basement of a church in Cologne, Germany. Jews were hiding in the basement of that church and those words were left as an affirmation of faith of God and as a call to conviction for the Christians at that church.

There is a new Disney movie out about the ride at Disneyworld, Tomorrowland. In the movie the young girl is told by her father a story about two different types of wolves, one that is dark and full of despair and the other that is light and full of hope and heart. The two wolves will always fight, but the one that wins is the one that you feed.

I had always thought that the important thing about the mustard seed parable was that it was small. I traveled to Israel when I was in seminary and it was there that I learned for the first time that in Israel mustard seed is a weed. It is uncontrollable. It grows and grows, often in places where it is not wanted. We can’t stop God working in our lives or working in our world. Jesus’ story shows us that something may seem small, it may seem insignificant, but God’s realm will grow mysteriously into something large enough to offer refuge to everyone. God uses small things, like seeds, like a shepherd boy, like us. God uses our kind word, our small offerings, our gestures of love and peace to do God’s will every day.

I ask myself every day, what is God asking of me today and how can I go about accomplishing that? How can I go forth to live for God? How can I make a difference in the world? What is God showing you that breaks your heart? There is no need that is too small to deserve our attention and no problem that is too big for us to tackle with God’s power.

Many years ago, there was a successful businesswoman who decided that she wanted to be baptized in a river. The pastor agreed and suggested several other people who would be interested in doing this along with her. “Fine, fine,” she said, not particularly concerned with whoever else was invited—not concerned until the group was at the edge of the river. It was a bizarre crowd, there was an older man in tattered clothing who didn’t appear to have shaved in months, there was a grumpy teenager dressed all in black, a young woman who was wearing clothes that showed a bit too much skin. The businesswoman was upset that she had made such a big deal out of this. She had bought a new dress for the baptism, but the rest of them did not appear to be taking this seriously at all. When the group waded out waist high into the cold morning water, the businesswoman, in between the chattering of her teeth, quietly criticized the pastor for assembling such a motley crew for this special moment. Her bitterness lasted through the pastor’s words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”—right up until her face went under the surface of the water. The splash of the water was a shock, the cold sending chills down her spine and clearing her mind of anything but a desire to get back to the surface. But as she was pulled upwards, she found herself emerging to the sound of an unfamiliar voice: “These are my children, the beloved ones, with whom I am well pleased.” Confused, the businesswoman tried to clear her eyes of the water that had been pouring down her face and opened them to a bizarre sight. She was surrounded by people who resembled those she had entered with but looked quite different: an older man who had lost his wife and drank away his sorrow and his livelihood, a teenager who felt alienated and scared, and a young woman who had never been told by anyone that they loved her. And it was there, standing in those baptismal waters, that the woman realized that she could never see the world in the same way again.[[3]](#footnote-4) She had been changed, transformed.

God’s realm will come. And God’s grace and mercy come because of God. God produces the harvest. We don’t have to worry about the harvest, God has that. We have to worry about sowing the seed. We have to act as ministers of reconciliation, not stirring the pot, but working to make it better. God’s kingdom will come, as a gift of hope and a miracle of love. May we scatter the seeds of love.

Children’s Sermon

We are to share God’s love anywhere, at all times, to everyone and it goes everywhere. We don’t know how the seeds grow, but God asks us to plant those seeds. Bubbles. When I blow the bubble, I can’t direct it. But I love to blow them, and where they land, they land. Lots of different ways to make bubbles. There are different ways to share God’s love.

1. <http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2859/kingdom-seeds> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/14/nyregion/mayor-de-blasios-plan-to-shrink-rikers-population-tackle-court-delays.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Sermon illustration found here: http://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2012/061712\_8am.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)