

**“NEVER
UNDERESTIMATE
THE POWER OF SMALL**

Based on Mark 4:26-34
*My thanks to Rev. Peter Bush,
outgoing Moderator, for this quote.*

The world likes big. Big houses, big paycheck, big office in the corner suite. Big names in Hollywood, big corporate mergers, big scandals to hit the six-o-clock news. One of the biggest difficulties in encouraging a Minister to move to a rural congregation is the fact that you have to convince the shopper in the family that they are close enough to big box stores! The world demands, “Go big or go home.”

Our outgoing Moderator at General Assembly said, “Never underestimate the power of small.” And our scripture says to us this morning,

“What shall we say the kingdom of God is like ... It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. ...” (v30-31)

Our Moderator was thinking of church growth and resilience. Christ was thinking of faith “Think small,” Christ might have said, “for good things come in small packages!”

It is difficult to decide whether our lesson today is two parables, or one parable which changed a little over the years as it was told around campfires, before someone got the brilliant idea to write the ‘good stuff’ down on a piece of parchment. I think I have decided that these parables are two sides of the same teaching, stuck together, back to back; one needing the other to begin or finish the story.

The second parable, the mustard seed, is classic New Testament at it’s finest, with a very simple message: from a tiny seed can come a large bush. Or as I said before, big things can come in small packages. And the more serious theological message: God’s kingdom can begin from the smallest of inclinations, and become something great, beyond our understanding, or our expectations.

But the first parable chimes in at this point and says, “Wait a minute. Not so fast. That seed did not become a bush in a blink of an eye. The seed had to be planted at the

right time, in freshly turned earth. The rains had to fall, and the warmth of the sun had to coax the seed case to split and the new leaves to emerge. And the grain did not just suddenly appear, but *“First the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.” (v28)*

This all took time and care and attention. Then, only when the grain was fully ripe, did the harvest begin.”

But then it seems as if the second parable takes over the story once again. “Wait! The story is not yet finished. There is more. Not only did the bush become fully grown, giving shade to the farmer and protection from the wind for the crop, but look, there is a nest being built in the branches. A mother bird will lay her eggs and raise her family. But the farmer too, may have a treat for his breakfast some day soon. “The gift that keeps on giving. All from a small seed.

Do not underestimate the power of small. Small things can result in big changes:

Changes to the way we think about the meaning of life.
Changes to our opinions on another person.
Changes to the care and attention we pay to others.

Changes to the way we see God at work our world.

Changes to the way we understand God working in our heart.

And do not underestimate the power of God to take those small changes, and continue to make more and more changes. The writer of the first parable would have us believe that the harvested grain was the measure of success. But the second parable reminds us; there is more joy and love, yet to come from this. Where it ends? Only God knows.

There are a few quiet cautions buried within the lines:

1. While the farmer knew how to tend the seeds of grain, he did not know or understand how the grain grew. That he left to the mystery of God. As should we. If you want small things to make big changes in your life, in your church, in your personal faith, then you have to make room in your heart also, for God to breathe into it.

2. The mustard bush is of great help to the farmers when grown along fencerows: protecting the maturing crop from wind or violent storms. But in the field itself, small mustard plants were an aggravation, as it still is for farmers today. Beware! Small seeds of victory may be growing right now in rather unexpected places. You may not always be comfortable where you find or who you find God busy at work with.

3. One small act of kindness is unlikely to have the results you are looking for. The farmer tended and nurtured his crop. Small acts, prayers, gestures, thoughts, done repeatedly are like ripples on a pond. The more pebbles tossed, the more rippling that occurs. I like lots of ripples.

The old adage is, "Look after the small things, and the big things will take care of themselves." Often, that is the case. Imagine what might

happen, if in our daily routine, at work, on the golf course, in the kitchen, or talking with the neighbour over the fence, you were to pay a just the 'teensiest, weensiest, mustard seedish" attention to something small in that moment; then acted on it, or treasured it, or prayed about it later.

What if you did this not once, not twice, but as much as you could?

What if you didn't try too hard to analyze it all, but just let the breath of the Holy Spirit fill your lungs for a bit?

What if you allowed yourself, for a moment, to truly believe that your God could do great things with that small moment? Not just say it, but believe it?

Imagine! Just how big our God could be in this crazy world of ours if we took a little more time to take care of the small things. Never underestimate the power of small. Amen.