

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY JULY 7, 2019

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Pass the Mustard, Please!"

Based on Matthew 13:31-34

Glancing at Chapter 13 of Matthew is rather like reading a rough draft of "Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul." There's lots about weeds and seeds; but it's rather a jumbled mess of ideas: parables presented in one part of the chapter, and explanations given elsewhere. I can't help but wonder if Matthew's scribe happened to be beside a window on windy day when he was gathering together all the bits and pieces of Jesus' most famous teachings, handed in by this person and that.

There, buried in the middle of this literary mess, is a few short lines that jump out clear as day:

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches." (v31-32)

No further explanation needed. It's quite simple. "Good things come in small

packages." Or, perhaps a little more accurately "Good things can come in small packages."

The parables are known in part, for their pointed and direct moral and spiritual messages. Jesus had been a clever teacher when He used them: presented images that would have been familiar to His listeners. As Jesus sat in

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~MATTHEW 13:32

meadows and village squares, with followers and seekers and lurkers gathered around Him, He spoke of the grain in the next field, birds flying overhead, warm bread that would await them for supper that evening: things people could relate to: touch, taste, smell. He didn't teach over

their heads, or, with an arrogance that made them feel foolish and insignificant: He simply said things like: "If My Father so cares for the little sparrow of the air, how much more will He care for one like you."

And the people of Jesus' day certainly would have known of the mustard bush. We have an annoying weed on this side of the Atlantic we call wild mustard. But in the Middle East, a much larger, bushier, tree like cousin thrives in the dry desert soil of the region. It was a problem for farmers in the field, but a perfect wind break, and shade cover along fence rows. It grew quickly with no fuss, and no watering, and when you it was chopped down, a new tree would take its place, from tiny seeds hidden in the soil. Its foliage was thick and protective, so birds would nest, providing an added bonus of fresh eggs for supper if you were lucky.

For as much of a nuisance the mustard bush could be, it was also a great asset for farmers. One man's problem was another man's secret to success. From something as small as a mustard seed scattered in the wind, the largest crop of grain could be

protected until harvest, providing money and food for a family, or even a village for a whole season. See where I'm headed here?

"Good things can come in small packages."

- Engagement rings in velvet boxes.
- Cheques in brown envelopes.
- The words, "I love you, Grandpa," from a grandchild.

But there is something more, something deeper, and something Spirit filled about these 'small' things of our life that become such 'big' influences on who we become, what we achieve, and how our faith weaves it way through that story. It isn't just that the mustard tree is amazing because it can become so big from such a small beginning. It's also amazing, because of the way it is grounded and rooted, and clings to life with such tenacity:

in storms,
in wind,
in a hostile
environment.

It holds tightly to whatever the world throws at it. It not only survives. It thrives.

Our Christian story began from a simple beginning. A small, unknown, rebellious carpenter, believed in something more than just surviving, spiritually speaking. He offered messages of hope to people

who believed they were hopeless and unworthy. His message started small, grew and blossomed, and then was pulled from the ground, or so the powers of the day thought. But of course, those powers could not see the tenacity of Jesus' story or His ministry. They could never have envisioned that from a ministry so small and seemingly insignificant from the hills of Nazareth, ministry continues today, in villages, towns, cities, jungle canopies, kitchen tables, and prison cells, all over our world. There was, and continues to be something tenacious about this faith of ours, something broad and rich and holds us in place, let's us sink our roots in deep, to weather the storms that life presents, and emerge victorious at the end.

Truth (with a capital 'T') is tenacious.

- God is tenacious.
- He is rooted in us.
- We are grounded firmly in Him.

Matthew knew this in his day, and reminded his readers that this tenacity was as old as the time of the prophets (v34). The fields of faith look different today than they did when Jesus taught so many years ago. Our church has changed shape, strength, and presence around the world: sometimes for the better, and sometimes, with not our best behavior. But Truth is tenacious. And as the church

seems to ebb in one corner, small seeds of faith take deep roots somewhere else.

- It is our task to take the faith we have, and make it as deep as possible.
- It is our task to grow our churches to be welcoming places in our communities.

But perhaps our task is not just to aim deep and wide. Maybe our task also, is to set our roots, spread our leaves, and hold mightily to that Truth we stand for. Maybe our task is to be tenacious:

- to weather the storms,
- to be a shelter
- to protect all that is good
- to be prepared to be pulled up and start again
- to be small if that is what is needed
- to be big if opportunity presents itself
- to be faithful to the Truth.

Who knew there was so much to such a little seed. Can someone pass the mustard please?

Amen.

