

Mark 4:26-34

The account which we have before us today is the last in a series of **parables** which Jesus taught on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, near the city of Capernaum. A **parable** is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, and Jesus made **use** of such parables for **two** reasons. Frequently, hardened **scoffers** would be present in the crowds which surrounded Jesus. They were there to find something which they could use **against** Him in the future. But, when Jesus spoke in **parables**, they weren't able to figure out the **importance** of what Jesus was saying. At the same time, there would be many **believers** listening to Jesus' words. And when Jesus spoke in **parables**, they **understood** the gems of truth which came from the lips of their Lord and Savior - gems which made their faith in Him even **stronger** than it had been before. One such gem is found in our text for today - the parable of the **mustard seed**. In this parable, Jesus teaches us that **Great Results Come From Small Beginnings**. Using a slightly different picture, a poet once said it **this** way, "*Large streams from little fountains flow. Tall oaks from little acorns grow.*"

Now, while little **acorns** don't seem to be very **important**, in comparison the **mustard seed** is virtually **insignificant**, because it is **much** smaller than an acorn. But as **small** as mustard seeds are, you probably **also** realize that there are **other** seeds which are even **smaller**. Nevertheless, when Jesus says, "*It is one of the smallest of all the seeds planted in the ground,*" His words are **true**. Jesus was talking about the seeds which were traditionally planted in the gardens of the Middle East, and of **those** seeds, the mustard seed is actually the **smallest**.

In reality, **all** seeds are relatively **small** when we compare them with the **plants** which they ultimately produce. There is tremendous **power** and **potential** in every seed. It's amazing how **hardy** they are - how they can overcome almost every obstacle which they encounter. If there's a **stone** in the way, the plant will grow **around** it. If the ground is too **hard**, the sprout has the strength to break through to the surface **anyway**.

We can easily move this picture out of the **plant** world, and apply it to the **human** world. For example, what **parents** haven't marveled at the miraculous physical, mental, and emotional growth of their **children** - from the time of conception to birth, through childhood and adolescence, and on into adulthood? What **teacher** hasn't looked at the students in his or her classroom, and wondered if there might be a future President of the United States sitting there - or wondered which ones would be the homemakers and factory workers, the pastors and teachers, or the doctors and lawyers of the future? There is great **power** and

potential in every individual - and every individual starts out **small**. **Great Results Come From Small Beginnings**.

And while we're talking about people, let's not forget about our **spiritual** side, because Jesus says, "*The kingdom of **God** is **within** you.*" That kingdom of God **also** had a small beginning. God planted the mustard seed of **faith** in our hearts at the time of our **baptism**. And from that time on, He has been watering and nurturing that seed of faith with His **Word** - so that it will **grow**, and **flourish**, and bear much **fruit**. The fruit which **we** bear will **show** itself, in the ways we **serve** our Lord.

Jesus gives us a prime **example** of the fruits of faith in today's parable. Concerning the mustard seed He says, "*When it is planted, it **grows up** and becomes **larger** than all the garden plants and puts out **large** branches so that the birds of the sky can nest under its shade.*" That little mustard **seed** grows into a garden **shrub**, often reaching a height of 10 to 15 feet! What tremendous **growth**! And that's exactly the kind of growth that the Christian **Church** has experienced. In the Book of Ezekiel, the prophet **predicts** such tremendous growth, and in the **New Testament** we see that prophecy **fulfilled**. The Christian Church started out **small** in **many** ways. First of all, they were small in **numbers**, beginning with just Jesus and His 12 disciples. However, slowly and surely their group **expanded**, and **grew** into a great **multitude**. The Church also started **small** in terms of **scope**, beginning in Galilee and Judea (particularly in the city of Jerusalem). Yet, within 40 years of Christ's death and resurrection, the Good News of the Gospel had already reached all the great cultural centers of the Roman world - and like the "Energizer bunny," it's still going, and going, and going! The Church started out **small** in terms of **prestige** too. The Apostle Paul reminded the members of the church in Corinth of their **humble** beginnings. He said, "*Consider your **call**, brothers. Not many of you were **wise** from a human point of view, not many were **powerful**, and not many were born with **high status**.*" For many years the Christian community was viewed with **disgust** and **disrespect**. They were even hunted down and treated as **criminals**. When it came to Christians, the motto was, "Shoot first, and ask questions later." But that has all **changed** now. **Great Results Come From Small Beginnings**.

Perhaps one of the most important facts which we should not lose sight of in this text, is brought out in verse 32, "*When it is **planted**, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants.*" Before the mustard seed or **any** seed will **grow**, it must first be **planted**. That's the way it has always worked in the **past**. In the Bible we hear about people like Abraham, and Noah, and Jesus' disciples - people

who had **received faith** from God, who had that faith **nourished** through God's Word so that it would **grow**, and who then found ways to **plant** the seed of the Gospel in **other** places - ways to **share their faith** with others. That certainly brings to mind for me, the importance of not just **talking about**, but actually **doing** mission work. The seed of the Gospel will **grow**, but it must first be **planted** - and the time for planting the Gospel is **now**.

I think you're probably all pretty familiar with **farming**, but even if you aren't, it doesn't take a big stretch of our imagination to realize that if we sit back and take it easy during **planting** time, there won't be any crops to bring in when the **harvest** time rolls around. It's not any **different** when we're talking about the **Gospel**. So, as we bring our gifts to the Lord, let's be **aware** of the many fields which need to be **planted**. Let's continue to bring **larger** offerings, so we can plant **more seed** wherever it's needed. Let's show our **support** for our fellow believers in North and South America; in India, Southeast Asia, and Japan; on the continent of Africa - and in all our **future** mission fields as well. In time, the tiny mustard seed of **faith** will blossom in **their** hearts too. And when it does, they will reach out to still **others**. But it has to **start** right **here**, in **Osceola** - and in **all** our hometowns. **Great Results Come From Small Beginnings**.

In conclusion, I'd like to tell you a true story about our WELS World Mission which broadcasts worship services on the radio into the Ukraine. One of the men who used to be involved in that mission outreach program told about the **generous support** which they had been receiving - especially from the **children** of our Lutheran Elementary Schools and Sunday Schools. But out of the **hundreds** of gifts which they had received, **one** gift in **particular**, really stood out in his mind. In that gift, along with the usual check, there was a **silver dollar**, and a note of **explanation**.

The teacher who had written the note explained that the little boy who had brought that silver dollar came from a family which didn't have many outward, earthly blessings. Afraid that perhaps the coin had been brought by **mistake**, she said to the child, "*This silver dollar must be something very **special** to you.*" And he answered, "*Yes, it **is**. That's why I brought it for **Jesus!***" What a beautiful testimony of a child-like **faith**. As opportunities all over the world **continue** to open up for us to do **additional** work - once again a **child** is leading us. **Great Results Come From Small Beginnings**.

We have the opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus right here at **home** too. So often, we seem to focus our attention on the **bad** things of life - the

disappointments, the discouragements, the shortfalls, and the cutbacks. We may even look into our community and say, “There are so many people out there who **never** go to church, and who aren’t even **interested** in learning more about God’s Word.” But the **blessings** are there too, just as God has **promised** they would be. What we need to do, out of **thankfulness** for what God has **already done** for us, is to **focus** on those blessings. When there are people who don’t go to church (and there always will be), that gives us the opportunity to **share our faith** with them. It gives us the opportunity to **show them** how much Jesus means to **us**. Our **children** can do it, and **we** can do it **too**. My friends, have **patience**, exercise your **faith**, keep on **praying**, and keep on **working** to spread God’s kingdom. We may not do everything **right**, and we may not do everything **right away**. But the important thing is that we **get started**, even if it’s in a very **small** way. After all, God will most certainly be **with** us to guide our thoughts, our words, and our actions - and remember **Great Results Come From Small Beginnings**. Amen.