

Mark 4:30-32 *And he said, "With what can we compare the Kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?
³¹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."*

What is the Kingdom of God? After all, this phrase is used over 60 times in the New Testament alone. Many scholars assert that there is no other short phrase in the entirety of the scriptures that so completely captures the message of the scriptures in such a succinct way. Many shelves can be filled with the exhaustive books have been written on this subject of the Kingdom of God. So what is the Kingdom of God? Or what is I like?

Well, in contrast to the long and exhaustive modern books written on the subject, Jesus in our text says simply, "The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed." No, the great king Jesus of the Kingdom of God himself didn't write a long treatise on the Kingdom of God nor did he give an hour long discourse on the topic. He simply stated that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.

And so today we allow His simplicity to lead us into the deep truths of the Kingdom of God. For in Jesus short explanation of his parable which we are given today, Jesus teaches us that the Kingdom of God is like the mustard seed in two important ways. First, it is sown in smallness. But secondly, it grows into greatness.

The mustard seed was in Jesus day the idiom of choice to denote smallness. The people of Jesus' day, for instance, would say that a drop of blood was as small as a mustard seed. When you wanted to refer the smallest thing one could imagine, you always used the mustard seed as your example. The mustard seeds you can buy today are probably larger than the ones Jesus might have held in his hand while he told this parable, but even today if I opened my hand from here holding a mustard seed, you probably wouldn't be able to see it.

The Kingdom in its sowing is that small. And that, at times, can be disheartening. You and I turn on the TV and see the prevalence of evil and violence in our world. We look around our community and see so many people living so far from God and his ways. And we continue to look inside ourselves as well, and we recognize the prevalence of sinful actions there as well.

And when the seed of the Kingdom is cast at these problems, it feels like mustard seeds are being thrown at mountains. Can all of this mess really be solved by the speaking of words, the splashing of water, the drinking of wine, and the eating of bread?

Well, let me ask a similar question. Could the life of a Jewish carpenter's son or his shameful death really accomplish anything? Surely to the casual observer, the answer would of course not. Jesus' life and certainly his death were sewing in smallness to the nth degree.

And after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, a new question could be asked. Could twelve ordinary Jewish men really make a big difference in their world? Could they even come close to doing what their master Jesus had asked them to do, to evangelize the entire world? Imagine the feeling of smallness those first disciples must have had. They must have felt as small as mustard seeds standing at the foot of a mountain.

Or how about a question much closer to home? Can a congregation of 300 people who worshipped about 130 on a Sunday that is in the middle of the country really accomplish much? Can anything we do out here truly have any recognizable effect on our world?

You better bet we can! The Kingdom is always sown in smallness. But it grows into greatness. The Kingdom that is sown as a mustard seed into the ground grows up into something that can shelter all people.

For the heat of God's wrath upon sin would be great without the shade of the good news about Jesus' death and resurrection to take away our sin. Yes the message of Jesus outstretched arms on the death and also at his ascension provide the needed shade for all sinners looking for relief.

Think of all the people that have come out of this small country congregation that have come here to know of the shade of the gospel. How many people walked out of this school knowing that the heat of God's wrath over sin would not touch them because of the shade of the gospel provided by Jesus? And it is not just the one who actually walked in and out of the door of the school. Imagine all of the people they have touched with this message they first learned here as they have scattered throughout the country and world. Consider how many people from the tiniest of babes from the eldest of adults has received shade not under the roof of this building but under the message of grace proclaimed here. Imagine all of the people in foreign lands that have found shade in the shadow of God's Kingdom because of the money we send to do mission work around the world.

And now imagine with me, if you will, what is still to come. Imagine what else God has in plan for us as individuals and us as a congregation in order to sow in smallness but reap in greatness. What other ways are we called to sow in our community and in our world? God is ready to plant the Kingdom through you wherever you go. And he is ready to plant through this congregation in our community and world as well. What ideas has he given to you for getting the word of Christ into the soil of Ellsworth County and beyond? Be not discouraged or keep your idea silent if your idea seems like a small step. Remember the Kingdom is always sowed in smallness. But it grows into greatness.

Look what the God accomplished through those twelve ordinary Jewish men. By sowing in smallness, God grew a handful and two disciples into the most influential phenomenon the world has ever seen. Yes through speaking in a synagogue here and a public marketplace there, by baptizing a child in Corinth and a adult in Ephesus, by sharing the supper with the Thessalonians and breaking bread with those in Rome, the Kingdom grew in greatness, providing needed shade for all who would believe.

And yes, that Jewish carpenter's son and his shameful death did accomplish magnificent things. As we well know, Jesus' life and death grew into greatness, so great that the entire world could be sheltered in the shade of his grace. Yes, the cross of Jesus is the greatest act of sowing in smallness the world has ever seen. But it is also the seminal example of something growing into greatness.

Ours is simply to trust the nature of the Kingdom as Jesus reveals it to us today. We are not to despise smallness in sowing and we are to trust greatness in growing.

But we must realize that we are tempted to do otherwise. We must realize that we despise smallness when we figure that the Synod and not each of us is to do mission work and evangelism. We despise smallness if we receive the supper today with little thought of the great blessing that we are receiving. We despise smallness if we watched Macey be baptized today and didn't understand the miracle that our eyes beheld.

And we show that we do not trust great growth in the Kingdom when we forget that a talk about Jesus over the fence could not only change one life, but multiple lives. And we also show our distrust of God's promise of great growth when we simply focus on keeping the church going instead of getting the church going into the community with the Word of Christ expecting greatness of growth.

David was small, not even consider as a candidate to fight Goliath of the Philistines. He was mustard seed of a man, so little he couldn't even walk in the adult armor of war. And against him stood a mountain of a man who name has become synonymous with size. The small David in his shepherd's clothing. Goliath covered in heavy bronze. But yet smallness grew into greatness with the casting of a stone. Smallness grew into greatness as little David beheaded the massive Goliath. Smallness grew into greatness as the shepherd boy David became the great King David of Israel. Yes smallness does grow into greatness.

It was true of David. And it is even more true of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is always planted in the smallness of words and water and bread and wine. But it grows and grows into greatness. It grows so great that all people who believe can come and find shade under its branches. All people can come there and rejoice in the good news of their salvation.

So let us rejoice as God plants the Kingdom here in Ellsworth and throughout the world through us in smallness. And then let us rejoice as it grows to give shade to all those sinners who need it. And finally let us await that last day when indeed people from all nations will be gathered under the shade of the Kingdom of God and will live forever with him in heaven.

This is the Mustard Seed. And this is the Kingdom of God. Amen.