

Sermon: Making a Good Point

Year B, Proper 6

[1 Samuel 15:34-16:13; Psalm 20; Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:6-17; Mark 4:26-34](#)

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Rev. Catherine A. Merrill

Well, that clears it all up. The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. Will the ushers please come forward for our ministry of sharing?

Is there anyone beside me who would have appreciated it if Mark had written just a bit more about what it was Jesus explained in private to his disciples (Mark 4:34)?

As I said in the Children's Sermon, a parable is an example of something you understand that helps you understand something you don't understand. Understand? The word in Greek means "laid beside" or "thrown beside". The idea being you huck two different things together and all of a sudden you see things you didn't see before.

Now, some of the parables of Jesus are harder for us to understand because we're not subsistence farmers living under Roman rule 2,000 years ago in Palestine. But I don't think that's the problem here. The Parable of the Mustard Seed appears in three gospels, plus it appears in the fragments we have of the Gospel of Thomas. So we're pretty sure Jesus really said it. Mark's version is the earliest version. Both Matthew and Luke change it up. So everyone thinks it's super important. You have to include the mustard seed parable if you're telling the Good News of Jesus, Son of God. But everyone thinks the other guys did a crappy job recounting the parable. They change it to make it clearer. Only it doesn't get clearer. The perspective and the emphasis keeps changing, so it stays out of focus, even for people who had mustard seeds in their gardens for flavorings or for medicines.

The Gospel of Mark was the earliest gospel to be written. It's the shortest of the four, in part because it includes almost nothing of Jesus' teachings or sayings. Today's chapter, chapter 4, is one of the few places we see Jesus teaching. For Mark, the key takeaway is: to be a disciple of Jesus you have to walk in his Way. You have to gain a perspective on what he went through, you have to be willing to go through that yourself, and you have to keep going.

Looked at through that perspective, Mark would probably say something like, "Look. The mustard seed is tiny. The bush is huge. That's what the kingdom of God is like. It starts small. And it gets big. Don't lose heart because the beginning seems so small. Just keep walking in the Way." And he has a point. A good one.

The story he tells before the mustard seed story is also a good one. Mark is the only one who tells this story and this is the only parable that Mark alone tells.¹ So it's important because of its uniqueness. It's an even crazier parable than the mustard seed one. I'm not a gardener in any way. When I get the urge for a house plant, I buy them from Market Basket because I figure if they haven't killed it, I can't. Until I do. But even I know that if you just sling seeds in the dirt and then *sleep and rise night and day* (Mark 4:27), what you get is weeds, not a harvest. But here is Mark saying, "Look. Plant the seed. God takes it from there. God's grace turns seeds into harvests. All the stuff you do to make the harvest easier on yourself blinds you to the reality

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 106.

of the miracle in front of you, blinds you to the reality that God is doing the hard work. Just keep walking in the Way.” And he has a point. A good one.

Just keep walking in the Way. Just keeping doing what you saw Jesus doing. Jesus knew, *knew*, what the Kingdom of God is like. And because he knew, he had to share it. And yet how do you tell people, the Kingdom of God is here and now and you don’t have to do anything hard for it? Sure it’s tiny now, but it’s gonna grow. Nothing you can do to stop it because it’s growing on God’s grace. You are loved without condition, without complication, without really being all that loveable, if it comes right down to it. And I know you don’t get it. How could you? Nothing else in this world can offer you News this Good. And for nothing. So let me tell you about the mustard seed and a bunch of other things, because maybe there will be a glimmer and that glimmer will keep you walking on a day when the Way seems way too hard to walk.

That’s the Jesus that Mark wants us to see, longs for us to see. Just keep walking. Just keep sharing God’s ridiculously impractical love with everyone. And he has a point. A good one.

Because we can’t predict what God’s going to do. There’s going to be a King Saul sitting on the throne of Israel. A King Saul sitting on the throne with strapping sons of his own, ready to take on anyone who wants to dispute the God of Israel’s decision to put the people of Israel on the land. And yet the God of Israel is going to send Samuel on a walk to Bethlehem, to anoint a new King at the same time. And not some warrior dude with a photo op perfect *height of stature* (1 Samuel 16:7). But the youngest son, having decided that seven of them don’t have the right heart for the job, God is going to pick the eighth son. With ruddy cheeks and beautiful eyes. (1 Samuel 16:12). Because *the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart* (1 Samuel 16:7).

Just keep walking in the Way. Go where God sends you. Do what God tells you to do. Keep sharing the message that once the seed of God’s love is planted, nothing is going to keep it from growing. That’s what we’ve been given to steward. Yes, we’re going to give money as a church to His Mansion. And whatever we give, it’s going to be mustard seed tiny. It’s going to cover their food costs for a day, maybe two. But what we’re giving is the food, plus the crazy Good News that people you have never met, people you will never meet, care about your escape from addictions that are deforming your life. Because you are loved, unconditionally, without really being loveable. And we know this because we are loved the same way, in a way that this world simply doesn’t love people. So we keep walking. And we share the Good News.

Our stewardship is more than writing checks to organizations which are doing good things. Our stewardship is impractical and crazy and ridiculous. In a sense we can’t explain it. But because we have this glimmer in our hearts, because we know that we can’t predict what God’s going to do, we’re going to keep doing what Jesus did, at least as well as we can. And we’re going to send toilet paper, paper towels, tissues and trash bags to Marguerite’s Place and Janice’s House because we love the letter “T” and because we love these families who are in transitional housing while their lives are upside down. We’re going to spread all these tiny mustard seeds of God’s love around, not because we can really explain it except to say, we’re following Jesus. He couldn’t explain it either. We’ll keep walking in Jesus’ way. We’ll keep telling these crazy parables of love about a small donation from a small church, about paper towels and trash bags. Because we heard Jesus’ story about the mustard seeds. And he had a point. A good one.