

***A sermon preached by Bob Keller on June 17th, 2018 (Father's Day) based upon Mark 4:26-34 and entitled, "The Wonder of a Tiny Seed"***

Was anyone here raised on a farm? Or maybe your parents or grandparents were? Since we're becoming an urban and suburban culture, many of us have lost the appreciation for agriculture, aside from those flowers we plant and maybe a few tomatoes or zucchini

But when Jesus was teaching people 2,000 years ago, almost every listener was familiar with planting seeds and harvesting crops. They didn't have a Shoprite or Trader Joe's to go to load up on groceries. They only ate what they could produce.

That's why so many of the parables of Jesus are about plants and seeds. In the two parables that Edward read for us, Jesus is talking about wheat seeds and mustard seeds.

"He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.

"Again he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.'"

The only kind of mustard most of us are familiar with is the kind you put on a hotdog. Or maybe your grandmother put a mustard plaster on your chest when you had a cold. But Jesus talked about the mustard seed because mustard plants were prolific around the Sea of Galilee.

I was going to bring in a couple mustard seeds to show you how small they are, but unless you're sitting in the front row and have exceptionally good eyesight; you wouldn't have been able to see them anyway. Not much bigger than the head of a pin, you can place over 200 of them on the face of a penny!

The mustard seed, like all seeds is a mystery. Jesus said a farmer plants a seed but he doesn't know how it grows. There was a professor at Auburn University, a PhD in Agricultural studies, who ran an experimental farm. He said, "Jesus said we don't know how a seed grows. That's no longer true. We know exactly how it grows. Heat and moisture cause the seed to germinate. It sends roots downward for moisture and shoots upward toward the sun. We know HOW a seed grows, but we don't know WHY a seed grows. Only God knows that." Three-thousand year old seeds, found in pharaohs' tombs, were planted – and they grew!

God's Kingdom started small. Jesus said, "It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground."

The mustard seed isn't the smallest seed in the world, but it was the smallest seeds with which people in Israel were familiar.

Once there was a group of tourists visiting a city in Europe. One of the tourists asked the guide, "Were there any famous men born in this city?" The guide said, "Nope. Only babies."

The Kingdom of God started with a baby placed in a manger in Bethlehem. Even when Jesus died, a mere 33 years later, the Kingdom was still small.

God specializes in taking small, insignificant things and making them mighty. After the First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, the Jews returned from the exile and started to rebuild the Temple. They had very little money and few materials. There were many who doubted the Temple could be rebuilt, but Zerubbabel, the governor, believed that it would happen.

The prophet Zechariah wrote these words on the day that Zerubbabel laid the first stone. "Who despises the day of small things? Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel." (Zechariah 4:10)

The Temple was ultimately rebuilt, although it wasn't nearly as beautiful and ornate as Solomon's Temple. It started with the laying of one stone.

Never despise the day of small beginnings. Years ago on a snowy evening in England, a young teenager was trying to find his church building. Due to the

blinding snow, he turned instead into a little Methodist Chapel. The preacher didn't make it that night due to the weather and there were only a handful of people there. One of the men of the church stood up and spoke on one verse from Isaiah. "Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth." At that moment a mustard seed of faith was planted in the heart of that teenager. His name was Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who would later go on and preach the Gospel to thousands and build a 5,000 seat auditorium in London that was never big enough to accommodate the crowds.

God's Kingdom grows steadily. Jesus continued, "Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants." The mustard plant can grow to a height of fifteen feet. Think of that – from a seed the size of the head of a pin to a fifteen foot tall plant!

The same is true of the Kingdom of God. From the tiny beginning of the Kingdom in a baby in Bethlehem, God's Kingdom has grown remarkably. The Church started with only a few people and has grown into a global family.

Jesus called 12 disciples to make up His inner core of believers. Of course one of them, Judas, disappeared. Jesus told them to change the world. On the Day of Pentecost, these 11 disciples were joined by 109 other people who were praying in the upper room. These 120 folks prayed for ten days, and on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and filled the disciples. Peter preached and those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day...and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Almost overnight, the church grew from 120 to 3,000—and then to 5,000 in a matter of days. Today there are about 2 billion people who claim to be Christians.

The growth of God's Kingdom isn't only true in terms of the numerical growth of the Church. But God's kingdom grows inside you as well.

Usually when you think of a kingdom you think of thrones, armies, and conquering nations. But Jesus taught there are two aspects of the Kingdom of God. There is the future kingdom when Jesus will rule and reign over the

whole earth when He returns. But for now, the Kingdom of God is within us. And just as a seed grows, we grow toward Christian maturity.

What is the Kingdom of God? In the scripture we learn, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17) Paul was addressing the fact that some Christians in Rome were still hung up on what a Christian should eat or drink, the “religious taboos” from the Law. He reminded them that God’s Kingdom isn’t about religious observance. It is about the righteousness we receive in Christ. It is about the inner peace we enjoy through Christ. It is about the overflowing joy that we have in Jesus. Like a mustard seed, there should be a growing awareness of righteousness, peace, and joy in our lives. But there is one other way in which the mustard seed illustrates God’s Kingdom.

There is shelter offered by God’s Kingdom. Jesus described the mustard plant, “...with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.” It’s not unusual to see small birds landing on the branches of the mustard plant; some even build nests in them. There’s a spiritual application here. Just as the mustard seed provides shelter for the birds, we find protection and shelter in a loving God. Psalm 91 says, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

How do we find shelter and protection in the branches of God’s Kingdom?

First, in God’s Kingdom you find rest from the weariness of life

Are you tired? Are you weary? Jesus has a personal invitation to you. He says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:28-29)

Just as the birds find rest and shelter in the mustard plant, we can find rest for our souls in Jesus. The yoke of Jesus isn’t a heavy wooden yoke like oxen use. It’s light because Jesus is on the other side providing all the strength and direction we need.

Can you imagine the life of a little bird? They fly around, but they can’t stay in the air forever. They need a place to land and rest. Does that describe

your life? Are you so tired of going, going, going, and working, working, working? Do you need a place to land and rest?

Jesus used God's care of the birds to illustrate the fact that we shouldn't worry. He said, "Consider the birds of the air. They don't work or worry. But their heavenly Father takes care of them."

Second, with God you can find eternal protection and peace

In Jesus, we find help for today, but also hope for tomorrow.

You know, heaven is for real. It was real before there was a book and movie by that name. It's beyond our wildest imagination. There are some things we have to put up with here on earth that won't be there. There will be no more sickness, sorrow, or death. There will be no darkness or wickedness there. There will be no more tears in heaven.

In 1991 Eric Clapton wrote and recorded a Grammy-winning song called, "Tears in Heaven." He wrote it with a broken heart after his five-year-old son, Conor, fell from the balcony on their apartment in New York. In the song he asked the question, "Would you know my name; If I saw you in heaven? Would you feel the same; If I saw you in heaven? I must be strong and carry on; 'Cause I know I don't belong here in heaven."

I love C.S. Lewis' famous quote on heaven. He wrote: "If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world." You and I were made for another world - the shelter in the Kingdom of God.

What's the take-away truth of the parable of the mystery of the mustard seed? God delights in bringing great things out of humble beginnings.

Consider Moses. God took a stuttering, washed-out 80-year-old mustard seed and used him to deliver God's people. Consider Gideon. Instead of an army of 32,000 God used 300 mustard seeds to defeat an army of over 100,000. Consider David. He was the youngest son in a family of great brothers, the runt of the litter. He took the job nobody else wanted. But he was a man after God's own heart and God took this mustard seed of a man and turned him into a giant-killer. One day a little mustard seed of a boy

gave Jesus his lunch of five loaves of bread and two fish, and Jesus fed a multitude with it.

Does any of this have anything, anything at all, to do with Father's Day?

Consider that all of us have, or had, a mother and a father. The mystery of birth requires an egg from a woman and that that egg must be fertilized by the sperm from a man. From this there are no great men or women produced – only babies.

Unlike the wheat in the parable, we don't rise and sleep and wait for the harvest. We nurture and care for the child. One of my favorite quotes on parents is that you should not be an anchor to hold your child back. Nor should you be a sail to send the child in the direction that you choose. But you should always be a light to help guide the way.

Take that responsibility seriously. There will be a last time that you carry your child on your shoulders. There will be a last time that you help your child with his or her homework. There will be a last time that you walk your child to school or the bus stop. There will be a last time your child crawls into your lap and say read me a story. But you will never know when that last time will be. You've done your job correctly. Your child has grown and matured into his or her own person. You've spent time training him in the way he should go. Cherish that time. Act for your child just as God does for us. Shelter him, protect him and give him joy and peace - just as God offers to you. Never despise the small things for raising a child is just like the mystery of the mustard seed.