

**Dr. Frank Allen, Jr.
First Presbyterian Church, Kissimmee, Florida
June 14, 2009**

**Note: A seminary student will be preaching at our church today, but I preached this "mini-sermon" for the Good Samaritan Village TV station.
Pastor Frank**

"Mustard Seed Faith"

In Mark 4:30-32 (NRSV) we hear Jesus say,

"With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? [31] It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; [32] yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

PLANTING A SEED

The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. According to Jesus the Creator God can take the smallest act of faith or kindness and make it into something significant. Let me give you an example.

Vic Bradon was a popular tennis coach and television commentator. But, Vic didn't always like tennis. One of seven children born to a coal mining family in Kentucky, the family moved to Michigan during the great Depression. His family didn't have much money, and Vic spent most of his time playing football, baseball and basketball. In Vic's mind tennis was a sport for rich kids.

But, there was one aspect of tennis that intrigued Vic. That was the ball itself. Vic liked to play with tennis balls, and he found that if he hid one outside the local court, occasionally the ball would come flying over the fence. Then he could take the ball home and add it to his collection.

One day Vic was caught red handed in his thievery. Lawrence Alto, the city's tennis director caught him and said, "You've been stealing those tennis balls, and I'm going to give you a choice. You can either learn how to play tennis or you can go to jail."

Well, as you might imagine Vic chose learning to play tennis. Within a week Vic was hooked on a game which would shape the rest of his life. Through tennis he was able to gain a scholarship to college where he developed an interest in psychology and later obtained a Ph.D. in that field. Vic's younger brothers also followed him to college and are now successful in their chosen field.

One man took the time to understand the needs of a little boy who stole tennis balls, and a life was changed forever.

I wonder. Who has planted a seed in your life? Who took the time to understand your problems and needs at a critical time? Who gave you encouragement when you were down and out?

We may think that our little acts of kindness are not that important. But, the Bible tells us that in God's hands the smallest seed of faith can become a powerful sign of the kingdom that comes. In God's hands the ordinary can become extraordinary.

STRUGGLE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

This was exactly what the early church needed to hear. They were a small, struggling minority. The political and religious establishment was out to destroy them. How could they possibly prevail against such odds?

I am reminded of Paul's last words to Timothy.

Paul you remember had preached the gospel all over the ancient world. And for his efforts he was beaten, stoned and imprisoned. Now at the end of his life he was awaiting execution, and it looks like all his efforts were for naught. He wrote, "... everyone has deserted me." Churches that he had planted were self-destructing. In the face of persecution many were forsaking the faith in general and Paul in particular.

No one came to Paul's defense. How disappointing this must have been for the apostle. Certainly it looked like the seeds of faith that Paul had planted all over the ancient world were destined to die of frostbite.

But, it didn't happen that way.

Paul had faith in the power of the seed. When it looked like all was lost an imprisoned and condemned Paul wrote to Timothy,

"I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him." 2 Tim. 1:12 (NRSV)

Paul was right. The gospel seed that Paul planted would soon blossom into the flower of a growing, vibrant church. The difficulties that the early church encountered did not destroy it. Instead the church became even stronger because of her struggle.

It was a witness to the power of the message. The seed that had been planted in the hearts of the people would not be uprooted by persecution or unfaithfulness. The success and growth of the church was sure because the power of God was in that gospel seed.

HAVING FAITH IN THE SEED

Things will not always go well in our lives. Sometimes it will seem like every seed we plant fails to grow. And that's when we need to remember this parable. The power is not in the sower. The power is in the seed. The power is in the promise of God. We need to wait on the Lord to bring the growth.

Nelson Bell was a pastor in North Carolina who giving counsel to a less experienced pastor. This young pastor was trying very hard to minister to the needs his small congregation. But, despite his best efforts nothing seemed to be happening.

The young man was very depressed by his apparent lack of success and confided his frustration to Pastor Bell. Dr. Bell asked, "Are you preaching the word?" "Yes sir." "Are you sowing the seed?" "Yes sir, I am."

Then the older, wiser pastor replied, "Then quit digging it up to see if it has sprouted!"

There have been many times in my life when I have been like that young pastor. I have been too impatient to wait on the Lord. I didn't trust in the power of God's seed. My self-doubt and fears got in the way of effective ministry.

In my experience this is true for many of us. We don't put enough trust in the power of the seed. But, when we look at the history of our faith we can see that the seed of God's word has produced consistently impressive results.

In fact the Bible in many places encourages us to trust in the power of God's word.

For example, the prophet Isaiah (55:11) wrote that the word which comes from God's mouth will not return to him empty, but will accomplish the purpose for which it was sent.

And in Hebrews 4:12 we read that God's word is "living and active. Sharper than any doubled edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

To put it in the terms of our parable for today, the seed of God's word has the power to change things. We just need to have patience and let God's word do its work.

TINY SEEDS, BIG RESULTS

I take great comfort from this parable. The things I am able to do often seem so small and insignificant. And yet this parable teaches that it's not about me and it's not about you. It's about God's will and God's word as revealed in his Son, Jesus.

The seeds might seem small and ineffective. But, Jesus tells us not to be fooled by their size. From a tiny mustard seed a great flowering plant blooms, and from God's word a great Kingdom grows.

We live in a bigger is better world. We're impressed by big buildings, big cars, big business and big nations. But, the story of the Bible is the story of God choosing the small and the insignificant to do His will.

That story occurs over and over again in the Bible, and then it reaches its zenith in the story of Jesus.

In some respects Jesus was a very small seed. He was born to peasant people in a stable. He was crucified on a garbage dump outside of Jerusalem. And then he was "planted" in a garden tomb.

But that seed did not stay in the ground.

Jesus proved to be none other than the Word made flesh. And when that seed "sprouted" on Easter morn a power was let loose on this world. And one day that Spirit will renew and rebuild the whole creation.

But, until that day we have been given the job of spreading the good news about Jesus. Death, the final enemy has been defeated, and we are called to begin a new kind of life, an eternal life here and now.

PLANT THE SEED

Do you believe that? Do you believe that the resurrected Christ is the first fruits of those who will be raised from the dead? Do you believe that the final enemy has been defeated by the power of Christ?

If your answer is "yes," then I think Jesus is challenging you as he challenged his disciples long ago to start acting on that belief. Stop complaining about what you don't have and start planting the seed that you

do have. Instead of worrying about a past that you can't change or a future that you can't control, do what you can today in faith.

**Plant the seed of hope in someone's life.
And then watch and marvel at what God can do.**

Please pray with me.

"Lord, you have begun a good work in us. You have planted a seed of hope in our lives that will not die. Give us the patience and the courage and the faith to become sowers of that seed in the lives of others. Don't let us grow weary in doing what faith requires.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior." Amen.