

## Wesley United Methodist Church

June 17, 2018

“Mustard Seed Faith.”

Mark 4:26-34

A man was out on the golf course. He spotted another man who had four caddies. “Why so many caddies?” the first man asked the second. The second golfer replied, “It’s my wife’s idea. She thinks I should spend more time with the kids.” Well that’s one way of doing it. Happy Father’s Day 2018.

Bill Keane was the cartoonist of the *Family Circus* cartoon strip. In one of his most memorable cartoons we see Dad relaxing in his easy chair trying to read the paper. He turns to see little Billy carrying his ball and glove. Billy says, “Anytime you’re ready, Daddy, I’ll be sitting outside growing older.”

Ooh, that hurts. It’s not easy being a Dad just as it is not easy being a Mom. Of course, there are times when dads come in handy.

I read recently about a beautiful wedding in which a radiant bride processed down the aisle on the arm of her father. They reached the altar where the smiling groom stood waiting. The bride kissed her father and placed something in his hand. It was...his credit card. Sometimes dads come in handy.

Our text today isn’t designated specifically for fathers. It is designed, rather, for followers, followers of Jesus Christ. The Master is talking about the kingdom of God and he speaks hopeful words about the days ahead. He says, “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 of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

Some of us may have a misconception about the plant which comes forth from a mustard seed. There is no such thing as a mustard tree. If you’re thinking of a tree like a mighty redwood growing from a tiny mustard seed, you are mistaken.

If Jesus had been teaching in California, he might have used a giant redwood and talked about the miracle of the acorn. The principle would have been the same. However, he was teaching in Palestine. And, so he chose the mustard seed.

The mustard plant is a shrub, but in that part of the world it is the largest of all shrubs. It is large enough for birds to nestle in its branches. The point of the parable is the same, however. From a tiny seed, major accomplishments may emerge.

An example of that growth is the story of the early church. It began with only Jesus and twelve disciples and an unknown number of women. We shouldn’t forget the women; they were there from the very beginning giving their support, sharing their witness. But look at how much that tiny group has grown.

It is estimated that there are now 2.2 billion Christians in the world (about one third of the total population of the planet) and are still growing. While it is true that churches in the West have slowed their growth, and some churches have actually declined, there are places like Asia, Africa, and South America where the Gospel is exploding. From the smallest of seeds, the mightiest of all plants has grown.

The church itself is a seed. God planted us in the world to make a difference in the world. And even though we have been a flawed group of people through the ages, the influence that this group of people has had upon our world cannot be overstated.

Many of the values of Western civilization are rooted in Jesus and the Scriptures. For example, all the hospitals in America were originally Christian hospitals. All the colleges in America were originally Christian colleges. The civil rights movement had its origin in the Scriptures. We are continually reminded of how male-oriented the scriptures are, but, tell me any religion on earth that has freed as many women as Jesus has.

A tiny seed planted more than two thousand years ago is slowly changing the world. Not as quickly as God would like. Sometimes Christian people are a barrier rather than a bridge to a better world. Still, that seed is growing until the day comes when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:8-11). There is indeed power in what we might call “Mustard Seed Faith.”

Of course, parents see the power of mustard seed faith all the time.

A baby is born into a household. Can you imagine the significance of that event? Every baby born into this world represents hope for a new beginning.

Our children are our most important produce as a church. That is why we must make our ministry to both our children and our youth all that those ministries can possibly be.

I love the way Pablo Casals, the world-renowned cellist, one described it: “What do we teach our children? We teach them that two and two make four and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are?”

We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel!

You are unique...there has never been another child like you. Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers, the way you move. You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel..."

They are a marvel. Children are the primary mustard seed that our church is sowing. If we do our job right, they will be ambassadors of Christ making the kingdom of God ever more of a reality in a world which badly needs saving. This is to say that one way we can serve God by helping our young ones know who they are and what God can do through them.

I guess this is turning into a Father's Day message after all. But, of course it's not just for fathers. It is for everyone in this room. You don't have to be a parent or a grandparent or an aunt or an uncle to influence a child's life. Everyone in this room directly or indirectly influences our children whether you are a parent or not. Some of the finest teachers in the history of the Sunday School movement have no children of their own.

Dr. Fred Craddock, long retired seminary professor who has influenced so many pastors across this land once told of the teacher who most influenced him.

Her name was "Miss Emma Sloan." Miss Sloan was an elderly woman, single. She taught him in the primary department, and since there was nobody to teach his group as juniors, she went right on with them and taught them for years.

She gave him a Bible. She wrote in the front: "May this be a light to your feet, a lamp for your path. Emma Sloan." She taught children to memorize the Bible; she never tried to interpret it. She said, "Just put it in your heart, just put it in your heart."

She used the alphabet, and they'd go around the room saying verses.

"A-A soft answer turns away wrath. B-Be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, as God also in Christ has forgiven you. C-Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden. D-Do unto other as you would have them do unto you. E-Every god and perfect gift... F-For God so loved the world..."

He says he can still remember those verses. Miss Emma didn't explain what the verses meant. She just sowed those seeds of Scripture from the Bible in their hearts. They learned those verses then recited them before adults on Sunday afternoon. "I can't think of anything, anything in all my life that has made such a radical difference as those verses," says Fred Craddock. "The Spirit of God brings them to my mind appropriately, time and time again."

You don't have to be a parent to have an influence on children or youth.

Every teacher, every adult who speaks a word of encouragement to a young person, every church officer who votes on the budget for our children's or youth ministry makes a difference on how effective we are in ministering to children and youth.

So many people ask, what great thing can I do for God? I can't be an overseas missionary. I don't have the resources to do much to feed the hungry.

But every one of us can provide the proper environment for our children and our youth to grow in an atmosphere of love, support and spiritual guidance.

Our children are the mustard seeds that God has provided us. We are to love them, nurture them and help them to be all God intended them to be.

"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 of all seeds on earth.

Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."

Some of you more mature friends probably saw the movie some years back, *Oh, God!* Starring George Burns and John Denver. Burns played God. Denver played a grocery store manager named Jerry. One day God decides to communicate his love to the world through Jerry. Jerry, with much reluctance, holds a news conference to deliver God's message. This lands him in a courtroom where God must take the stand in his defense.

Toward the end of the movie, the two evaluate the success of their mission. Denver, the manager, judges it to be a failure. "Oh, I don't think so," says God. "You never know; a seed here and a seed there, something will catch hold and grow,"

And that's the story of our faith a seed here, a seed there. But the kingdom is growing. One way it is growing is our ministry to children and youths. There is power, unlimited and everlasting power in a tiny mustard seed. Amen

