

WHAT IN THE WORLD ARE YOU DOING FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE?

MATTHEW 13:31 – 33

Bohn Fawkes was a B-17 pilot in World War II who flew a number of missions over Germany. On one occasion his fuel tank was hit by an enemy missile, and he was miraculously able to land the plane. He discovered that, for some unknown reason, the missile had not detonated. If it had, the plane would have exploded instantly and Fawkes would have been dead.

The next day he asked if he could have the unexploded missile as a souvenir – a reminder of his good fortune. He learned that his fuel tank had not been hit by one missile, but eleven! All eleven of the missiles were sent off to intelligence to be examined. It turned out that the missiles were empty on the inside; all but one. And inside that missile was a note written in the Czech language. Eventually they were able to find someone who read Czech, and learned what the handwritten message said:

"This is all we can do for now."

A courageous factory worker had disarmed the bombs and scribbled the note. He couldn't end the war, but he could save one plane. And for Bohn Fawkes, it meant everything! The main point of today's message is that God does great things with small deeds. And we're looking at two short parables that Jesus told about the mustard seed and yeast. Jesus took two everyday things that the average Jew would be very familiar with, in order to explain the nature of the Kingdom of heaven.

I. MUSTARD SEED AND YEAST PROPORTIONS.

The one thing that mustard seeds and yeast granules have in common is that they are tiny. Jesus says in v.32 that, in proportion to all the other seeds, the mustard seed is the smallest. In fact it takes 750 of them to weigh one gram. Now for those of you who are horticulturists, yes, it's true that there are some seeds that indeed are smaller than even

the mustard seed. But Jesus is speaking of seeds that were cultivated in Palestine and that were familiar to the average person.

If you've ever opened up a jar of yeast, you've seen that the granules are miniscule in size. If you look at any recipe for bread, the amount of yeast needed is tiny in proportion to the flour and other ingredients. But the tiny mustard seed eventually grows into a tree-sized plant of 12 to 15 feet high with branches that can host an entire flock of birds.

And the teaspoon or two of yeast added to some dough?

At first it will disappear to the naked eye, as it's worked into the dough. But even though it's hidden in the dough, it is very effective. In an hour or two it causes the dough to rise and multiply in size, yielding enough bread to feed a hundred people.

So even though the minute mustard seed and the tiny yeast granule are not very impressive to look at, what begins humbly – small and barely noticeable – becomes powerfully effective and massive over time. If you think about it, many things in life that have a great impact actually begin by being small:

- Your white blood cells, that ward off infection
- The spark in your engine that powers your car
- Termites – that can destroy an entire building over time
- E coli bacteria can transform a hamburger into a lethal weapon inside the human body

If you were to plant a bamboo tree and observe it over time, you'd discover that for the first four years it does nothing. Or at least it seems that way. But then, suddenly during the fifth year it shoots up 90 feet high in only 60 days. Now, would you say that the bamboo tree grew in 60 days, or in 5 years?

Well how does all this relate to the kingdom of heaven? Jesus is saying that small things like the mustard seed and the yeast granule can end up having far reaching effects. And that also is true for God's kingdom. God often works from the small to the large.

Think about it for a moment. During Jesus' public ministry, the kingdom of God was hardly noticeable, and understandably so. After all, Jesus was born to a humble carpenter in a region that was not even on the radar of the Roman Empire. None of the disciples that He chose came from positions of religious or political leadership. They were uneducated, few in number, slow to understand and believe, fearful, and weak. Not exactly qualified to lead an earthly kingdom!

The twelve had only grown to 120 in number by the time of Pentecost. Not exactly what we would call a large church today. But this was the nucleus of God's kingdom. This was the nucleus of the early Church. And yet Jesus predicted that this kingdom that started so small, so humbly, would grow over time to become a visible force, a powerful and influential force on our world.

Let's consider how the kingdom of God spreads. Like the yeast, at first apparently unnoticed, God's Kingdom eventually grows to become powerfully effective – influencing the environment around it in a profound way. Like the mustard seed, miniscule at first, then growing large enough to bless not only the farmer and his family, but also the birds that flock to its branches for shelter, so it is with God's kingdom. It grows in quality and quantity until it impacts the community around it for good and for God's glory.

Let me share with you three modern day examples.

CORNERSTONE EPC

On September 18th we'll be celebrating the 25th anniversary of Cornerstone and our 20th year in this building. But if we look back to its beginning in 1986:

- There was a small group of people meeting at Don and Madelyn Restauri's house.
- And then came the famous tea bag invitations that were sent out to Brighton area households.
- The first church meetings were held at Maltby Middle School

But look at us today: God has done great things – using Cornerstone to reach not only our community, but all around the world.

LOVE INC OF THE GREATER LIVINGSTON AREA

Love In the Name of Christ started very humbly seven years ago with just 12 churches committing to combining their resources to more effective care for those struggling financially in our county. The office was a cubicle provided by Cornerstone; some referred to it as being the size of a postage stamp!

But today there are 51 churches working together, meeting over 6,000 needs per year. The office building is 3,700 square feet and filled with staff and volunteers serving our community.

LOVE INC KENYA

Three years ago God prompted me while I was having dinner with a dozen pastors in Nairobi. They had just completed their first collaborative work, distributing emergency food to a region of Kenya that was undergoing a famine. I suggested that they might want to consider the model of Love In the Name of Christ and shared our experiences at Cornerstone. The next year a partnership was formed between Love In the Name of Christ and World Relief and last year 10 of the 12 pastors visited Love INC affiliates here in the States and attended the Love INC annual conference. They returned to Nairobi with a vision of forming not one affiliate, but a dozen! The first three will be launching in the next few weeks.

So yes, the Lord uses small, humble beginnings to accomplish His purposes. And He grows those tiny beginnings into great works for His Kingdom. Next, let's consider:

II. MUSTARD SEED AND YEAST PROVISION.

The question that I want to ask you this morning is this:

Who provides the mustard seed and the yeast?

Human beings cannot create them. Both the mustard seed and the yeast granule have a germ of life within them. And that germ of life comes from God.

Only God can create a mustard seed or a granule of yeast. But just as important, God empowers them! He gives them their ability to germinate and explode into something powerful and effective and useful.

In his book titled ***Sun Stand Still***, Pastor Steven Furtick tells of a fun activity called wave jumping that he engages in with his young son at the ocean. I remember doing it with my own four kids at our family cottage on Lake Huron when they were little, maybe 5 years old. I'm sure many of you have done it as well.

To go wave jumping, Steve's son Elijah holds his hands up high and Steve holds tightly to his hands. Then they wade out into the ocean until the water comes up to Elijah's chest. There's obviously some trust building that needs to take place here! And then they wait for a big wave to come.

Once Elijah sees it coming, he screams – to make sure his dad is in position. And then at the last possible moment, just before the wave wipes out Elijah, his father pulls him up high by the wrists – high enough so that the water doesn't get in his face or in his ears. Guess how Elijah REACTS once the wave has passed?

He's proudly screaming at the top of his lungs,

"I'm the wave jumper!

Let's jump another wave, Dad!"

Now let me ask you: Who's the real wave jumper? Not that Steve would have the heart to tell his son, but we all know that it's not Elijah. It's his dad.

His dad is the one doing the heavy lifting. Elijah's assignment is simple and minimal: to keep his hands reaching upward and trust that when the wave comes, his dad will lift him high above it. Elijah should probably be shouting, "I'm the hand holder!"

I think that's a great picture of our role in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said, ***"I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it."*** Matthew 16:18

"To Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus..." Ephesians 3:20-21

"...it is God who works in you [both] to will and to act according to His good purpose." Philippians 2:13

Here's how God's faithfulness and our faith are meant to work together. God gives us work to do for His Kingdom. As I said last week, He calls us to go out into the world, out into our marketplace to share His truth, His light, His love, His grace to those in need.

And Steven Furtick puts it well when he adds:

"As the big waves roll toward us, God promises to do the heavy lifting. He only requires that we have the faith to wade in as deep as He leads and keep reaching up to Him."

God wants you and me to have a humble confidence as we step out to do the work that He calls us to do.

- Humble, because we realize that without Christ, we can do nothing.
- Confident, because with Christ, we can do all things!

God has placed a mustard seed in your hands. Really! Look carefully, with the eyes of faith, and you'll see that you have a mustard seed provided by God – small in proportion, but tremendous in opportunity and potential.

- What talent has God given you?

- What burden has He placed on your heart?
- What opportunity has He set before you to serve Him?

And then, more importantly:

How are you using it to expand God's Kingdom? To build up His Church? To make a difference for eternity's sake?

Verse 31 says, ***"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and planted in his field."*** God calls you to plant that mustard seed and cultivate it, develop it, so that with His empowering help, you can truly produce something of significance for His Kingdom and glory.

Michelle Willhite, a young mother of our congregation, went home to the Lord just the other week. I first met Michelle just about a year ago, when she called Caring Ministries to ask about making a donation of clothing to the REACH Shelter for the homeless of our county. I was amazed to learn the story of how she got involved in providing clothing for those in need. Michelle's sister had had a fire in her home, and many people came with clothing to replace everything that her family had lost in the fire. Because of the overwhelming generosity shown to them, they had much more clothing than they could possibly use, so Michelle offered to take it home and organize it. She contacted various shelters in Southeastern Michigan and brought in the clothing. A staff person at one of the shelters was so impressed with Michelle's organized manner that he asked, "Which non-profit organization are you with?" "I'm not with any organization," answered Michelle. "I'm just doing this out of my garage." "Well, then you need to form a non-profit, because you're so well organized and efficient."

And so Michelle took that as a prompting from the Lord to sow the mustard seed He had given her, and she formed Operation Homeless Relief. As she learned more about the needs of the shelters, she was moved to contact local stores to see if they would donate clothing. The result was a series of regularly scheduled pickups from local merchants to supply the needs. In fact, in the midst of chemotherapy, Michelle was planning the

substantial distribution of clothing for last January's Community Connect held here at Cornerstone. All because she was willing to follow the Lord's prompting! She said that, because so many people have come alongside her over the years, she wanted to be there for others as well. On her website, you can read the following words that she penned: "Could you be that friendly stranger with a hug in your arms, tears in your eyes, and a reaching hand? Could you be that person, because you are thankful for your walk in life, thankful for those who have walked it with you, and thankful that you have not had to walk your life alone? You know, deep down inside, you wouldn't be the same person today if you had no one!"

Remember: You don't have to be the wave jumper. That's God's role. Just step out in faith and hold His hand.

III. MUSTARD SEED AND YEAST POTENTIAL.

In v.32 Jesus says, ***"Though [the mustard seed] is the smallest of all your seeds, when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."***

Just as the mustard seed grows from a tiny beginning into a great tree that benefits the birds as well as the farmer, Jesus said that the Kingdom of God that started small would one day become huge and benefit the entire world.

As we look at the history of the United States, we discover that the Church of Jesus Christ produced the first hospitals, the first universities, the first orphanages and foster care homes, and enough areas of social reform for women, children, the elderly, and the disabled to list for several pages. Wherever the Gospel is faithfully preached and practiced, the world around it benefits as well.

As Christians, we need to always remember that there is an unseen Kingdom of God that is every bit as real as the tangible world around us. And that Kingdom is marching to victory and will ultimately triumph over all evil when Christ returns. After all, Jesus said, ***"I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it."***

Matthew 16:18

It's like sitting in a football stadium and having your home team ahead by 28 points with only 5 minutes remaining on the clock. You watch the clock running out, but you know that victory is a foregone conclusion. Well, it's almost like that!

Back in 1995 Coach Gary Barnett led Northwestern's football team from rags to riches in a season that landed them in the Rose Bowl. The following season, Coach Barnett met with the Wildcats for the opening of spring training, and he announced that he was going to hand out awards that many of the players had earned the year before. Each accomplishment was written on a poster board and handed out while the teammates cheered.

One of the other coaches gave Barnett a poster board listing his 17 national "coach of the year" awards. Once the applause died down, Coach Barnett walked over to a trash can and turned it around so that the players could see that it was marked 1995. Barnett took an admiring look at his poster board and then dropped it in the trash can. In the silence that followed, each of the team's stars dumped their placards in the trash as well. The coach's unspoken message to his team was clear: *"What you did in 1995 was terrific, but look at the calendar. It's a new year."*

Don't get me wrong. There's a place for celebrating the accomplishments of the past. On September 18th we'll celebrate God's faithfulness to Cornerstone and all that we have accomplished by His grace for His Kingdom. We'll do some serious "boasting in the Lord!" But our best years as a church lie ahead. With Jesus Christ we have mustard seed potential!

That's why the Apostle Paul said, ***"Forgetting those things which are behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*** Philippians 3:13-14

God has entrusted a mustard seed to us – as individuals and as a church. And He does not call us to sit on the sidelines or rest on our laurels until Jesus returns! He doesn't want us to settle down and be satisfied with a maintenance ministry until the second coming.

So how do we reach our potential for Jesus Christ - as individual believers and as a congregation?

First, WE PRAY. We pray and ask the Lord,

- "What do you want me to do for Your Kingdom?"
- "What's mine to do?"
- And as a church, we ask "What's ours to do for Your Kingdom?"

Second, WE BELIEVE GOD'S PROMISES and STEP OUT IN FAITH AND OBEDIENCE TO HIS CALL.

After all, Jesus said, ***"I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."*** Matthew 17:20-21

Paul said:

"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

2 Corinthians 9:8

God says, *"Believe me. Trust me, and see what kind of harvest I will give."*

THIRD, WE CONTINUE TO TAKE A STAND FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

- We don't water down the Word of God
- We submit ourselves to the lordship of Jesus Christ over every area of our lives
- We don't dilute the values that made our church what it is today – even if those values aren't popular with our culture

Finally, we go out into the community and the world and WE LOVE OTHERS IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST.

We go out into the marketplace as Jesus did and bring the Kingdom of God to bear on the lives of those who are lost and trapped in their sin. If you're not in regular contact with unbelievers, then something is wrong. Ask the Lord to show you how to follow His example.

How do we love others in the name of Christ?

- Our conversations are to be characterized by truth and love
- We are to welcome and accept people in spite of their sinfulness and brokenness, yet without compromising our commitment to God's truth and His standards
- The Bible says, ***"This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for one another."***

1 John 3:16

- ***"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."***

Galatians 5:6

If you haven't committed your life to Jesus Christ, you will never realize your potential apart from Him. You need to take that first step and open up your heart to Him. It's only through Christ that you can become the person that God created you to be. No matter how old you are or what you've done so far with your life, God can make something meaningful and beautiful and glorious out of your life.

For all of us this morning, we need to consider the fact that God has given us "***a measure of faith***" according to Romans 12:3. You know, you don't have to have a lot of faith in order to do something significant for Him! Jesus said that faith the size of a tiny mustard seed can move mountains.

But we need to get serious about looking into our hands and seeing the mustard seed that God has placed there – to advance His Kingdom, to build His Church, to make a difference for eternity. What are you doing with the provisions and the opportunities that He's given to you?

- Moses had a staff
- Dorcas had a needle and thread
- David had a sling shot
- Rahab had a rope

What do you have?

What has God given you to invest for His Kingdom?

The Bible says, "***Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin.***" Zechariah 4:10 NLT

No one can do everything. But everyone can do something to advance the Kingdom of God. Jesus urges us, "Don't focus on the larger picture. Start with the small. Start with what you can do."

Let's return to that courageous factory worker who disarmed the bombs and scribbled the note.

- He couldn't end the war, but he could save one plane.
- He couldn't do everything, but he could do something.
- And so he did it.

God does great things with small deeds!

So what's your next step?

Sow the mustard seed God has given you.

Add the yeast to the dough.

Maybe that means committing yourself to two services this fall; one for worship and one to learn as a disciple of Jesus.

Don't ignore what God has entrusted to you.

Perhaps the Spirit is prompting you to:

- Make the phone call.
- Write the check.
- Join a ministry or start one.

One thing I know for sure: He wants you to jump some waves for the Kingdom!

God will do the heavy lifting. Just grab His hands in faith and step out. For in the hands of God, small seeds grow into sheltering trees. Tiny yeast expands into nourishing loaves.

That's a promise!