

## Sermon Draft

Text: Mark 4:26–34

### Sermon: The Seed of Faith

In our text this morning from Mark's Gospel, Jesus speaks of something so small that with the naked eye it is almost impossible to see from just a few feet away. Let me show you (hold mustard seed in palm of hand). Can you see it?

So, what I am holding? A mustard seed. And the reason I brought it up is because our Lord Jesus Christ spoke some seemingly curious words about such a little thing. He said, and I quote: ***“THE KINGDOM OF GOD is like a mustard seed”*** (v 31). That does not seem to make sense. A mustard seed? An insignificant, unimpressive seed, quite obviously incapable of doing anything great, is like **“THE KINGDOM OF GOD”**? It seems difficult to reconcile the words of our Savior with a tiny seed.

But that is what Jesus teaches in our text today. The KINGDOM OF GOD, like a mustard seed, merely appears insignificant, unimpressive, incapable of doing anything great.

It is important to begin by understanding that the kingdom of God to which Jesus referred is a reference to himself and his saving work. Scripture tells us that Jesus sat with people, taught or healed them, and then proclaimed, ***“the kingdom of God is in the midst of you”*** (Luke 17:21) or the ***“kingdom of heaven is at hand”*** (Matthew 4:17).

But just as the puny mustard seed cannot be seen from more than a few feet away, Jesus often appeared insignificant, unimpressive, incapable of doing anything great.

At first glance, this “Kingdom” did not seem like much of a kingdom at all. Christ had no armies. Instead, he had twelve ordinary looking fellows following him around, some of whom had the odor of fish. Apparently, this Kingdom did not even include Nazareth, as Jesus was thrown out of his hometown. This Kingdom included the least desirable people around: sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors. You might as well just invite anyone into it and he did. Some Kingdom this was. Insignificant, unimpressive, and by all appearances, it seemed incapable of doing anything great.

Especially did it seem unimpressive when its King was hauled off, hung up, and dragged down. Jesus, it appeared, was no match for a few lightly armed temple guards, to say nothing of the mighty Romans. He seemed to fall tongue-tied under pressure, have no answer to his accusers, no eloquent final inspiration for his followers. Hanging on the cross, he looked as helpless as a rebel slave. And dead, well, nothing was going to come of that.

Of course, Jesus knew all this. That was exactly his point when He spoke of the mustard seed. ***“And he said, ‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade’”*** (vs 30–32).

Though this seed is tiny, from it would grow the largest plant in the garden. From something so insignificant, unimpressive, seemingly incapable of doing anything great would come a plant so wonderful that living creatures can find shelter and refuge in it. And when it comes to the kingdom of God, Christians would do very well to remember and believe this lesson, because not much has changed to this very day.

For the kingdom of God is among us. The kingdom of God is here. Jesus is as active today among us as he was when he healed the paralytic man and forgave his sin. He is as active today as when he gave blind Bartimaeus his sight (Mark 10). He is as active today among us as the day he fed the five thousand (Mark 6). For Jesus comes to us via the Means of Grace, his Word and Sacraments, to forgive, renew, and give life. We are called to faith by his Gospel. He washes our sin in Baptism. He feeds us his Supper for our salvation. The kingdom of God is here, reigning in truth and grace through the ministry of his Church.

And yet, to the naked eye, this kingdom of God, this kingdom of grace, does not look like much. Bread is just bread. Water is water. Wine is wine. Spoken absolution is just a bunch of words. And the only thing that sermons heal is bad cases of insomnia. We can go through the entire Sunday paper and find nothing that happens here has been deemed worthy to print not even in the “Life” section.

But perhaps what is even worse is that, when viewed by Christians, the kingdom of God among us still seems insignificant, unimpressive, and incapable of doing anything great. We have heard the list of concerns: the people just are not coming in; the offerings are going down; our witness seems to fail; and, more than that, my child’s behavior doesn’t seem to be improving, even though I bring him to church!

It is at these times that Christians may lose faith and be tempted to dress up the Good News to make it more appealing or water down the Word to make it more palatable or even censor the cross to make it less offensive.

This is what happens when Christians lose heart, believing the Kingdom presented here is just an insignificant mustard seed. When that is all we see, we are in trouble.

So once more let us call to heart and mind the truth of our Savior's words. The Kingdom merely appears insignificant, unimpressive, and incapable of doing anything great. Jesus said that while the mustard seed is the smallest of the seeds, when it is planted it grows and becomes the largest plant in the garden, perhaps as high as ten feet, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade. Though human wisdom and logic, when left to themselves, can never believe it, the eyes of faith behold it aright.

In faith, we see things as they are. Every Sunday morning, the seed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is sown. People hear. Some, in faith, repent. And in that very moment, the host of heavenly angels is rejoicing. A thrill goes through heaven above at something that took place down here among us.

Here the almighty and merciful Creator speaks to us by his Word. And we speak to him in our prayers and in the name of his Son, who made peace for us with the Father through his blood shed on that cross. He listens.

We praise the strong name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in song. Together, we stand as one Body baptized in Christ and boldly confess our one faith in one voice, clearly stating who God is and the deeds he has done in the words of our historic creeds.

And, oh, yes, sins are forgiven. My sins, your sins, are paid for in the death of our Savior, Jesus. Pronounced to us in absolution, received by us in the Supper of Christ's body and blood. Guilt is replaced by peace. Death is replaced by life.

As Luther so simply put it in the Small Catechism, where there is forgiveness of sins there is life and salvation. And through all these gifts, the Holy Spirit is at work strengthening faith and love toward our God, and he moves us to love our neighbor. That is the mustard seed growing, and that, by the power of the Spirit, is what happens here.

To miss this kingdom of God through the ministry of the Church would be like looking into the manger and seeing only an unfortunate baby. To pass by the Word and Sacraments as superstition would be like someone looking to the cross and seeing only the execution of a religious idiot. In this life, in this world, the kingdom of God will appear to be just a mustard seed: insignificant, irrelevant, incapable of great things.

But as we know, that was not just another baby in a manger, and that was not a religious sap on the cross. So, we know and rejoice that the Good News of Jesus, which is the power of God unto salvation, hidden in common earthly means, is revealed to us. Power that has forgiven our sins, called us to faith, and given eternal life. This ministry started on the other side of the world and provides a refuge of grace and peace across the world still today.

And like those birds that Jesus talked about, seeking shelter in the shade of a mustard plant, we live by faith within the shelter of this kingdom of grace, where Christ's righteousness covers all our sin.



And then, one day, when our Lord returns, we and all the world, believer and unbeliever alike, will see just how great the kingdom of the mustard seed is.

But until the day of God's appointing, we who live in and with knowledge of the mystery of the mustard seed have lives of extraordinary hidden significance. No one may take notice of a parent who has a devotion in the Word with his child for five minutes at the end of the day. Seemingly insignificant. A small amount of time. But remember the mustard seed and rejoice in what you do in Jesus' name. Likewise, a simple invitation extended to someone to come to church, where the gifts of Jesus are given. It will not make the nightly news, but it could cause rejoicing in heaven.

It's just like Jesus said in the other parable in our text: ***"The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear."***

***But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come***” (vs 26–29). No big deal what the farmer does, what we do, but what a harvest!

Rarely, if ever, will someone esteem us or praise us for living by faith in Christ. The Sunday paper or evening news won't report it. And it is not their job. But for you and me, who own this glorious mystery, it is our job. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. And do not forget it. Behold it in faith, and then live in its grace. Invite people to come to this place, where the precious seed is sown. And let us pray that God will make it grow among us all.

Amen