

*...You will need one mustard seed to hold
in your hand before you read this.*

Mark 4:26-34

The Parable of the Growing Seed

He also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 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.'

The Use of Parables

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

"...the seed sprouts and grows – how, he does not know." (Mark 2:27b)

A stranger appeared at the door, tired and hungry. The old woman invited him in for lunch and made him a sandwich with thick slices of bread. "Thank you, ma'am," said the stranger. "That bread was delicious." "Don't thank me," the woman said, "I bought the bread from the grocer. Thank him."

So the stranger found the grocer and said, "Thank you for the delicious bread I had for lunch at the woman's house today." "Oh, don't thank me," said the grocer. "I bought the bread from the baker across the street, she's the best baker in town, it's her you should thank." So the stranger walked to the bakeshop and went inside to ask to speak to the baker. "Thank you for the delicious bread I ate at the woman's house today," he said. "The grocer said you make the best bread in town."

"Oh, don't thank me," she said. "What makes my bread so delicious is the fine flour I use. The miller grinds the wheat carefully and thoroughly. It's the miller you should thank."

So the stranger walked further across town until he came to the miller's.

"Thank you for the delicious bread I had for lunch at the woman's house.

The baker told me it's the way you grind the wheat that makes the bread so delicious." "Oh, don't thank me," said the miller. "I do grind wheat well, but you should really go and see the farmer I get the wheat from. He knows how to grow the best wheat around. He's the one you should thank."

So the stranger walked farther along following the directions the miller gave him until he came to the farm. He saw the farmer and his family in the fields harvesting the wheat. "Thank you for the delicious bread I had at the woman's place for lunch," he called. "The miller said I should come and thank you ...your wheat is the best, and that's why the bread is so delicious."

"Oh, don't thank me," said the farmer. "Then who?" asked the stranger.

"Help us finish harvesting the wheat, stay for supper and I will show you."

So the stranger spent the afternoon with the farmer and his family working in the fields. And in the evening when they all went in for supper he sat with them around the table. He joined the circle of hands as the farmer blessed the bread and said, "Praised be Thou, oh Lord our God, who brings forth the bread of the earth."

Something big grows.

Are we wheat grain or mustard seed?

Do you still have the mustard seed taped on a piece of card? If not, keep looking at the one (hopefully) you have in the palm of your hand.

Grain and seed.

Whenever Jesus wanted to make his followers think, he told them a parable. Words that are code for something else. He used things that everyone would recognize from their daily living. Fish (nets), soil (fields), vine (branches), water, birds, wine...and people. Parables are only for those 'on the inside.' At first hearing, they seem like inconspicuous puzzles. What is Jesus talking about now? It was a good thing that he explained it all to the disciples later. There's a saying- "Jesus told so many parables, he became one."

Don Saliers also offers something to think about,

"Could the most profound of all parables be the life and death of Jesus?"
So, the parable isn't about us, after all?

Luke Timothy Johnson says something interesting when he claims maybe the inside-disciples weren't as much on the inside as they thought they were. Why don't they/us understand? In fact, they didn't really understand more than the outsiders. Jesus has to explain the sower now sows the Word. Jesus used parables to keep too many people from understanding. To those who could hear, he spoke the word. But to the insiders he used parables.

He wanted to see who had a hungry heart, wanting the bread of life- those who found the world's answers not enough.

But they/we do know one thing - something big grows from something small. A seed is planted and the farmer has little to do with whether it grows or not. No matter how much watering, fertilizing, snipping, pruning and fussing he does, he just has to trust. The kingdom/faith is like that....trust.

The story of the mustard seed (or versions of), is told in three gospels (not John). There are some similarities and some differences. As usual with the gospel writers they each have their own version of the story. If three of us witness a bank robbery from three different locations...one from inside the bank, one outside the bank, and one down the street. Each of us would tell the story from our own viewpoint. Some details important to one of us may not matter all to another.

Police officers talk to as many witnesses as they can. They say, "Who saw what happened?"

Things that matter to Mark and Luke, are different from Matthew. For instance, they say, "...the kingdom of God is like...while Matthew says, "...the kingdom of heaven is like..." Today we use both words to mean both words. But in all three stories Jesus is comparing the kingdom to the mustard seed that has been sown in the ground. Luke doesn't even mention the size of the seed, but to Mark and Matthew this is very important. Maybe Luke leaves it out because as an educated physician he knows the mustard seed is actually not the smallest seed...orchids, cypress seeds are smaller. Maybe the most common seed was the mustard seed.

Each of the gospel writers talk about what happens after the seed is planted. Mark describes it as 'the greatest of all shrubs.' Thomas James says it sounds like a fisherman's tale, "It was thi----s big!"

Matthew says it was a shrub, and then a tree. Luke says, "... it becomes a tree." We often ask ourselves, "Shrub or Tree?"

Most of us, after a little research, will know that there is mustard shrub, but never a tree. Was the meaning behind a Big bush or Tree? Was it meant to tell us that something really big happened? Or would happen if

Then the birds of air. It's possible that birds can build a nest in either a shrub or tree. But were the branches of the mustard shrub not strong enough to hold a nest? (Christ is the vine, we are the branches) Maybe Mark thought Jesus said shrub, not tree? Is there something significant Mark is telling us?

We know well the story of the mustard seed, but what about the wheat flour? Do we talk about the size of the loaf like we do when we talk about the seed? Maybe it was just a bun. Is it about who eats, who gets fed? Maybe who gets full? Who doesn't eat at all? Maybe it's about everyone working together to make something good, something big like the kingdom of God. It would be interesting to know the exact words Jesus used.

Were the disciples/we focused on the wrong things, though?
The seed refers to Faith Bible Jesus God 'Heaven' If the seed is planted in you, you will grow into a place of refuge for birds, and for those who need shelter and hope. We are biblical mustard seeds.
It sounds kind of nice. Shelter or weeds.
Mustard seeds grow really fast. Farmers don't like them growing all over their wheat. They're actually considered weeds. Verse 32 says "...yet when it is sown..." Mustard seeds are deliberately planted. They don't just fall where the wind blows them. Mustard seeds butt in where they're not necessarily wanted, make their presence known in kind of an annoying(?) way.
But who planted Us? Shelter or weeds.

Yeast acts the same way. It's deliberately mixed in with wheat flour and left to rise. In a few hours the flour and yeast have risen and are falling all over the sides of the bowl, going where they shouldn't. We don't have anything to do with what the yeast and flour do.

Jesus spoke in parables to stimulate imaginations – what does he really mean about God? Nibs Stroupe says Jesus was saying, "You matter because God is in your life. You count because God has filled you with life-giving gifts." He says Jesus emphasizes - the power of imagination/parables is more important than the power of will." But don't we always say, "If I had the will-power...?" The parable of the scattered seeds is saying God's kingdom depends on God's grace, and our own initiative. Is he saying it all doesn't depend on us? That would be a relief. But we do have to be careful not to be impatient like the farmer who had mustard seeds all over his crop...or the disciples wanting to know how to interpret the parables. The saving act of God in Jesus Christ remains revealed and unrevealed at the same time. Like the early church we understand and we don't understand. Jesus is persistent, though.
He lives, He dies. He lives again.
"What is God's kingdom like?" we keep asking.
Like a grain of wheat, or a mustard seed?