

Mustard Seed Faith

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants ...so that the birds come and perch in its branches."

Matthew 13:31-32

Jesus was a master storyteller. His teaching very often took the form of a parable – telling a simple short story using everyday items or actions to define a deeper spiritual truth. In today's Scripture, He tells a parable of great depth in just two verses.



Of the seeds known and sown in Israel at that time, the common mustard seed was so small it was often used proverbially to describe the smallest thing one could think of. And yet it grew into a tree that could be 15 feet tall or more! Inside a tiny seed the size of a breadcrumb, God placed the potential to be an enormous plant. Over seasons of being watered by rain and energized by sunlight, a barely visible seed grows into something that can be seen far and wide. This points not to the greatness of the mustard seed, but to the greatness of God who specializes in bringing much out of little. The way of God's kingdom is to grow from seemingly insignificant things into that which changes the world.

The kingdom of God had humble beginnings here on earth. His own Son made his entrance into human history in a cradle in Bethlehem. When Jesus walked the earth, the estimated total population of the world was between 200 and 400 million people. Jesus lived in a remote province of the Roman Empire and had 12 ordinary men that walked with Him. Yet from those 12, His message reverberated throughout the world as in the power of the Holy Spirit, they testified to others who then told others and then others, and who then passed the message on to the next generation until His kingdom spread throughout the earth. From the tiny seed planted in Bethlehem to the grand tree where all His children "perch in its branches, the mustard seed of that humble beginning is well on its way to becoming the enormous tree of His eternal kingdom.

Jesus' point in this parable is that the beginning of the kingdom was tiny to the point that it seemed insignificant. Hardly anyone noticed it. But just as the tiny mustard seed grows into the largest of plants, the kingdom of God will keep growing until someday it will be completed by His return in a trumpet fanfare of glory and majesty that will be seen by all.



Jesus made another reference to mustard seeds in His ministry: *Truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.*" (Matthew 17:20).

That same small seed can accomplish great things. Jesus proclaims that our faith is small compared to the power of God that is behind it. Do you hear the potency of these words? A tiny seed of faith can unleash extraordinary possibilities. What matters more than the size of our faith is the object of it— the One who created heaven and earth and holds all things in His hands. In the presence of our all-powerful God, there is no obstacle that is insurmountable and no challenge that is too great.

Nothing is too hard for Him (Jeremiah 32:17). Our influence may be limited, our means may be modest, and our abilities may be humble, but God builds His kingdom from small efforts that are faithfully rendered to Him. His Spirit takes our humble offerings and prayers and by His power uses it mightily, and our mustard-seed faith flourishes into bold prayer and courageous action. God can take our tiny seed of faith and move our mountain.

May He give us the faith to look beyond the smallness of what we can do and see the extraordinary possibilities that come when we place our tiny seed of faith in an infinite God.

"The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It happens quietly. It happens inevitably. Don't underestimate God's power."
—Alistair Begg

The Journey to Faith



I was born December 15, 1940, just before the US entered WWII. My father was rejected for service because of a stomach ulcer. He was a janitor in the

building in which we lived on the south side of Chicago. My parents were Catholic, but I cannot remember them going to church except Christmas or Easter. Our church was St. Thomas the Apostle, the patron saint of doubters - we were certainly planted in the right church. I had already begun to wonder about God in the 4th grade. I couldn't understand where everything came from: the earth, the stars, the universe, everything.

In school, when kids got to 7th grade, the Catholic children were dismissed early on Wednesdays to take Catechism lessons. For 2 years, I was introduced to the essentials of the Catholic faith - the concept of God, faith, sin, punishment, Jesus the Redeemer, heaven and hell.

I was a nerdy kid of above average intelligence, and my designated public high school was a rough school - one in which it would have been difficult for me to succeed. Private school was financially out of the question. Catholic school was a middle ground.

For 4 years I had daily instruction in the Catholic faith. I went to Mass every week. By the end of high school, I understood the Catholic faith, but I also had a lot of questions. The Catholic faith emphasized good works and following rules to basically earn our way into heaven. But I (and everyone else!) was always breaking the rules. On Saturdays, a priest listened to confessions of my sins of the week and gave me penance (usually a few prayers), and I was absolved of my sins. But this whole process just seemed like a way of fooling God. We would sin from Sunday through Friday, confess on Saturday, be absolved, then sin all over again! Was God really going to be satisfied with that? Was it that easy to fool God into thinking that we were leading spiritual lives?

By the time I graduated, I was really confused about faith. Although I attended Mass regularly, I couldn't understand how this mechanical process of sinning and confessing, over and over, was making me a better and more spiritual person. In college, I still attended Mass regularly, but my doubts about faith were increasing.

I hit the theological wall shortly after getting married (1962) and was trying to find answers of how my Catholic faith was the path to heaven. I couldn't make myself believe that I could fool God into thinking that I was a good person. I wasn't - I was a constant sinner! All the confessions in the world didn't change my lifestyle. I had plenty of things in my life that I was certain were sins.

I decided that I was never going to be able to answer my faith questions, so I put it out my mind. Since I couldn't find answers, there was no point in thinking about it any further. I was just going to live my life and take my chances at the end. If there was a God, I would just have to stand before Him at my final judgment and let Him decide my fate. End of story.

But it wasn't the end of the story. The question of faith would not go away; it kept nagging me. I didn't want to go to hell. I was trying to be a good person, but was I willing to take my chances before God? How was I going to convince God that I was good enough to be admitted into heaven? If I were God, would I let me into heaven? Probably not. After all, if you let one person into heaven with 1 sin on his soul, why not a person with 2? How about 3, or 4, or a dozen? Where does it stop? I concluded that I was certainly going to hell if I didn't learn how to be saved. I needed to find the answer. I wanted to be in Paradise when I died!

In February 1990 my wife and I began to study the Bible together. I searched the Word, listened earnestly to sermons, and attended any Bible studies I could find. Finally in 1992, some of the verses began to make sense to me, mostly, Ephesians 2:8-9, *By grace are you saved through faith; it is the gift of God - not by works so that no man should boast.* Grace is given to you. Faith is believing without necessarily having definite proof - faith that Jesus was/is God and that He died for me in full payment of my sins. His gift is eternal life. The verse clearly tells us that we are not saved by doing good works. We are saved by the grace of God because we believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior who died on the cross in atonement for our sins.

After I finally understood how I could be saved through our Lord Jesus, my life completely changed. The burden of sin was lifted from me. I knew that Jesus paid the penalty for my sins. When this life comes to an end, I am assured that I will be forever in the presence of God. That comforting thought lives in my heart, and I am not afraid of death because I know it is the gateway to eternal life with the Lord. I will be in a place where there are no tears, no worries, no illness, no anxiety, no tribulation. My loved ones who have faith in the Lord will be there, and eternal life will be perfect. Is there anything that is more desirable than that?

Joe Dsida

2nd Thursday

We invite you to join us for the kickoff of our 2nd Thursday season on September 12 at noon. Enjoy a delicious catered lunch (menu TBD).

After lunch, we are pleased to welcome Deaglan McManus, Allegheny County Park Ranger. Deaglan's specialty is the cultural and natural history of our county parks. He will present the History of Hartwood Acres. Prepaid registration of \$10 for this luncheon is due by Friday, September 6. Register online or call the church office.



If you are able, please bring a non-perishable food item to donate to NHCO.

His Eye is on the Sparrow

Civilla Martin/Charles Gabriel

Why should I feel discouraged,
why should the shadows come,
Why should my heart be lonely,
and long for heaven and home,
When Jesus is my portion? My constant friend is He:
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
For His eye is on the sparrow,
And I know He watches me.

"Let not your heart be troubled," His tender word I hear,
And resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fears;
Though by the path He leadeth, but one step I may see;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

[Refrain]

Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,
When songs give place to sighing,
when hope within me dies,
I draw the closer to Him, from care He sets me free;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

This song that has comforted millions of Christians all over the world was written in 1905 by Civilla Durfee Martin. Civilla was born in 1866 in Nova Scotia, Canada and was a schoolteacher with modest musical training. She married evangelist, Walter Stillman Martin, a Baptist minister who was educated at Harvard. Together they traveled all over the United States holding revivals. They often wrote gospel songs for their meetings.

This song was inspired by a visit Civilla made to an ill and bedridden friend. Civilla describes the visit: "Early in the spring of 1905, my husband and I were sojourning in Elmira, New York. We contracted a deep friendship with a couple by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Doolittle—true saints of God. Mrs. Doolittle had been bedridden for nearly twenty years. Her husband was an incurable cripple who had to propel himself to and from his business in a wheelchair. Despite their afflictions, they lived happy Christian lives, bringing inspiration and comfort to all who knew them. One day while we were visiting the Doolittle's, my husband commented on their bright hopefulness and asked them for the secret of it. Mrs. Doolittle's response was simple: 'His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.' The beauty of this simple expression of boundless faith gripped the hearts and fired the imagination of Dr. Martin and me."

Her friend was quoting Matthew 6:26: "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not of more value than they?" And later in Matthew (10:29-31), the Gospel writer continues this theme: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father knowing... Fear not therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows."

Civilla wrote a poem about the visit the same day. The next day she mailed the poem to Charles Gabriel, a well-known composer of hymns. Mr. Gabriel adds this to the story of this hymn: "One evening... while in a despondent, down-hearted mood... I remembered having received a hymn in the day's mail which I had not yet looked at. Taking it from my pocket it seemed like a voice speaking directly to me as I read, and its melody rang out of silence into my heart exactly as it is sung today."

The following day Mr. Gabriel sent the song to Charles Alexander, a noted hymn singer of the time who was a leader in what became known as the great Torrey-Alexander revival. "The Sparrow Song" was first sung in Albert Hall during that revival. Since that time, the song has soothed and comforted millions. The theme of solace in sorrowful times and a profound sense of being under the watchful care of Jesus became a theme song of many during the Civil Rights movement.

The sparrow is one of the smallest and most common birds in the world and is considered of no consequence to many people. But Jesus says, God cares and notices when one of them falls to the ground. If God cares about the tiny sparrows, how much more will He care for you?



Fall Bible Study

**God's Top 10 - Living the 10
Commandments in our 21st Century World**

**Thursdays September 6 thru November 7
at 10AM
in the Edinburgh Room.**

Contemporary society reveals that many neither know nor care about the law of God. In an age of "anything goes," the message of the 10 commandments can give us order, direction, and hope. These timeless truths are more than a list of rules to memorize; they're an invitation to a fulfilled life overflowing with joy and blessing.

Puzzle Page – This month, look for fruit! The leftover letters reveal this month's Scripture.

S	P	O	M	E	G	R	A	N	A	T	E	I	P	R	F	Y	D
T	S	O	R	U	H	M	A	E	P	U	O	L	A	T	N	A	C
A	V	A	T	A	E	A	F	I	G	S	U	I	I	F	T	A	I
R	E	V	N	U	N	N	T	H	A	M	S	U	P	E	S	S	H
F	N	O	M	A	N	G	T	A	S	I	R	A	S	L	T	L	O
R	I	C	S	A	N	O	E	S	N	F	P	A	C	M	I	U	N
U	R	A	E	S	C	A	C	S	N	A	T	H	A	R	U	D	E
I	E	D	I	I	S	E	B	O	Y	S	E	N	B	E	R	R	Y
T	G	O	R	E	D	Y	I	A	C	R	O	W	U	C	F	A	D
N	N	P	R	S	A	S	S	Y	R	T	A	S	O	T	E	H	E
I	A	I	E	S	S	M	E	I	U	T	S	E	L	P	P	A	W
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N	H	E	N	D	A	E	S	E	A	V	A	U	G	A	A	A	N
A	L	D	N	E	N	I	T	N	E	M	E	L	C	R	R	I	T
R	W	A	P	E	R	S	I	M	M	O	N	B	I	G	L	T	L
C	M	T	N	A	R	R	U	C	O	P	U	M	P	K	I	N	S
B	E	Y	Y	N	E	C	T	A	R	I	N	E	O	U	X	X	X

APPLES

APRICOT

AVOCADO

BANANAS

BLUEBERRIES

BOYSENBERRY

CANTALOUPE

CHERRIES

CLEMENTINE

COCONUT

CRANBERRY



CURRENT

DATES

ELDERBERRY

FIGS

GRAPEFRUIT

GRAPES

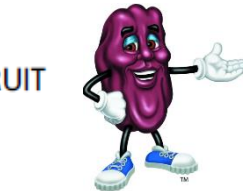
GUAVA

HONEYDEW

KIWI

LEMONS

LIMES



MANDARIN

MANGO

NECTARINE

ORANGES

PAPAYAS

PASSION FRUIT

PEACHES

PEARS

PERSIMMON

PINEAPPLE



PLUMS

POMEGRANATE

PRUNES

PUMPKINS

RAISINS

RASPBERRIES

STAR FRUIT

STRAWBERRIES

TANGERINE

WATERMELON

