

When you think about God moving in history, what usually comes to mind is something amazing like the parting of the Red Sea. And when you think about God changing lives, what usually comes to mind is something dramatic like Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. But, of course, God doesn’t have to work that way. Actually, such impressive techniques are more the exception than the rule. God usually works quietly through little things in little ways. In fact, sometimes He works through things that may not seem “spiritual” at all, and He works in ways that may seem downright weird!

Case in point: let me tell you how my own family got involved in church. I never really thought about it, much less how weird it was, until one day on internship when I was visiting an elderly woman named Emma Lund. As we sat there talking, she asked me, “What is our opinion on card-playing these days?” Since then I have learned that some people frown on card-playing, but I had no clue at the time. All I could say was, “I don’t know if we have an opinion” – which wasn’t the right answer. “We are against it, aren’t we?” And what could I say? Then it dawned on me. “Emma, let me tell you how my family got involved in church.”

“I was five years old and starting kindergarten, so my folks decided it was also time to start looking for a church. The question was: Which one? My mom had grown up in the Disciples Church, but there was no Disciples church close by. So they tried a big church downtown; it was too big. Then a small church closer by; it was too small. Then our neighbors invited us to the Lutheran Church. Now, my dad had been baptized in the Lutheran Church, all our family in Germany belonged to the Lutheran Church, so my folks decided to give it a try. And was it “just right”? No! They hated it! It was too stiff. Too formal. They didn’t know the liturgy or the hymns. They weren’t going back.”

“But shortly after that visit, Pastor Rubin stopped by. He had a beer with my dad – which impressed him. He told my dad about a fishing trip he’d been on – which impressed him. And he invited my folks to a young couples’ bridge party that was coming up that weekend. Now, my folks were avid bridge players, so they decided to go. And they had a great time, really liked the people they met, so when they got home they decided, “Maybe we should give this church another try,” which they did. And the second time it wasn’t so bad. The third time it was okay. The fourth time it was like they had always done it that way. And before long, my folks went through instruction, got confirmed, and we kids got baptized. And it didn’t stop there. My folks were never ones to go half way, so once we got involved in church, we got *involved*. Worship every week. Family devotions every night. Grace at every meal. Religious discussions around the dinner table.” “That’s great,” she said. “Yes,” I agreed, “but think what God worked through to bring it about: fishing, beer, and bridge. Why, I don’t know if I’d be a pastor today were it not for fishing, beer, and bridge!”

Did I convince her? Probably not. And some of you may be aghast. But fortunately, God is more pragmatic...and not at all ashamed to work through little things in little ways. Some of the strongest Christians I know started coming to church because a little friend invited them. Some of the greatest ministries around started out with very little funding. Those of you who have been around here a while, think of the Tri-cities Chaplaincy, how that got started. Or our TV broadcast, Good News Today. No, God is not at all ashamed to work through little things in little ways! In fact, that seems to be His preference! It just shows that much more clearly what great things God can do!

Jesus makes this very point in our text when He says, **“the kingdom of God...is like a mustard seed.”** Now, **“kingdom”** would be better translated **“kingship.”** He’s talking about the way God establishes His rule and carries out His work in the world. And **“it is like a mustard seed,”** Jesus tells us. Just consider. At first, you can barely see a mustard seed. If you didn’t know better, you would never guess it could produce anything at all. But don’t be fooled! That seed may be small, but it is packed with potential. If you sow it, water it, and give it time, that seed can grow into something pretty impressive! And it’s the same way with God’s work in the world. Our efforts may seem tiny. Our resources may seem small. But don’t be fooled! God can work through anything, however small. A word, a gesture, a gift, a prayer – these may not seem like much, but in God’s hands, they, too, can grow into something pretty impressive. In God’s hands, even our smallest, humblest efforts are packed with potential!

And isn’t that good to keep in mind – especially when it comes to serving the Lord? For starters, it helps keep us motivated. I don’t know if this is true for you, but what discourages a lot of Christians is thinking what they do won’t make any difference; their efforts seem too small, too insignificant. For instance, maybe you’re a Sunday School teacher. Week after week, you do your best to prepare your lesson, only to find that week after week less than half the kids show up, and only a fraction of them pay attention. Pretty frustrating, isn’t it? And it’s natural to wonder, “What good can my efforts do?” But that’s why Jesus reminds us that **“the kingdom of God...is like a mustard seed.”** Your job is not to get results. Your job is like sowing seeds. Week after week, you’re sowing seeds of God’s Word, and those seeds are packed with potential. True, you may not see them sprout right away. You may not see how your efforts will produce anything at all. But that’s how it is with seeds. You don’t get results right away! You need to sow those seeds in faith, water those seeds in faith, and trust that in His time God is **“able to do abundantly far more than all”** you **“can ask or imagine.”** Results will come. I mean, just take a look around this congregation. I wonder how many of us were model Sunday School students! I wonder how many of us caused our teachers grief. I certainly did! But even so, God used their efforts, didn’t He? God was not ashamed to work through little things in little ways to produce the growth we experience today. And that’s the perspective we need to hold onto! **“The kingdom of God...is like a mustard seed.”** In God’s hands, even our smallest, humblest efforts are packed with potential!

And actually, from a slightly different angle, I got a good glimpse of this just in the past month – on Facebook, of all places! For those of you who aren't familiar with Facebook, it's an internet social network where you can send messages, post articles, share pictures...and you can also take little quizzes. Most of them are pretty lightweight – like “What Star Trek Character Would You Be?” But late one night about a month ago, I thought it might be fun to create a serious quiz for educational purposes. Kind of a “Facebook Catechism Lesson.” So I did. It's called, “*What Kind Of Lutheran Are You?*” At the time, I figured it would do the rounds here at RLC, and that would be it. But talk about something little being packed with potential! As of today, guess how many people have taken this quiz. Over 9,000! And just consider what this means. Nine thousand people have taken the time to think about what they believe. Nine thousand people have taken the time to ponder selected Bible verses. Nine thousand people have taken the time to reflect on their particular style of discipleship. And what do you think? Might God be able to work through that somehow? Sure, it started out small, started out as a game, but like a mustard seed it grew and grew and grew. And for me personally it just confirmed how God works. He really is not ashamed to work through little things in little ways, and He really **“is able to do abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine!”** In this particular case, He tipped His hand a bit – though just a bit; I still have no idea what all He might do through this quiz. But even this little bit is such an encouragement! Little things can have big results! And it's also a great incentive to keep on sowing mustard seeds! Especially when we feel discourage, keep on sowing seeds!

We don't want to make the mistake of giving up too soon! I have been in the ministry long enough to have seen more than a few “impossible cases” turn around in amazing ways. Within the past 12 months, I have seen a man who had no use for God turn around and die a committed Christian. I have seen a couple whose marriage seemed hopelessly broken turn around and rekindle their love. I have seen a young adult with substance abuse problems turn around and get help. In the past 12 months! So here are two thoughts. First, doesn't this show how wonderfully God can work through our prayer, encouragement, and support?! For make no mistake, there was a lot of prayer, encouragement, and support for these three! And that leads to my second thought: What if Christian friends and family had given up on these people? What if we had given up our prayer, support, and encouragement? What if we had given up sowing our mustard seeds? What a tragic, short-sighted mistake that would have been!

I am haunted by the promise in Galatians 6:9, **“Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for in due season we will reap a harvest if we don't give up.”** Now, **“due season”** isn't always predictable, is it? And which seeds will sprout, which ones won't – that's not always predictable, either. We all remember the parable Jesus told about that. But one thing is sure. No sowing of seeds, no harvest. No cultivating seeds, no harvest. No patient perseverance, no harvest. We don't need to see what God is doing to trust that He is hard at work. **“We walk by faith, not by sight.”** And if there's one thing faith assures us, it's that

God is no quitter. He's not going to give up on anyone – not even seemingly impossible cases! So we mustn't give up, either. We just need to keep on sowing those seeds in faith, keep on watering those seeds in faith, keep on trusting that in His time God is **“able to do abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.”** We just need to keep on keeping on, confident that **“in due season we will reap a harvest if we don't give up.”**

And that really is the encouragement we take home with us today. I'm reminded of a great quote from Luther. If you were to visit his house in Wittenberg, you would see it painted over the front gate: *“Never give up the faith that God wants to work through you.”* How beautifully that summarizes the point and purpose of our text! **“The kingdom of God...is like a mustard seed.”** Yes, our efforts may seem tiny – like a mustard seed – but God can bless what we do and even use it in ways we would never guess...if we don't give up. So patience and faith are required. Perseverance, too. Just keep on sowing our mustard seeds, trusting that God is at work in ways we cannot see, and never giving up the faith that God wants to work through us. He will take care of the rest. Of that we can be sure! For God is not ashamed to work through little things in little ways! To the contrary! In God's hands, even our smallest, humblest efforts are packed with potential! Amen.