

Intro Slide

THE AWESOME POWER OF A MUSTARD SEED

Mark 4:26-34

Welcome on this Father's Day 2012.

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A man was out on the golf course. He spotted another man who seemingly had four caddies. "Why so many caddies?" the first man asked the second. The second golfer replied, "It's my wife's idea. She thinks I should spend more time with the kids."

Well, that's one way of doing it. I suspect he's the same Dad who was asked by his wife when they brought home their first baby to help with changing diapers. "I'm busy right now," he said, "I'll do the next one." The next time came around and she asked again. The husband looked puzzled, "Oh! I didn't mean the next diaper. I meant the next baby!"

Comic Robin Fairbanks says, "I have an 18-year-old daughter; her name is Alexis. I chose that name because if I hadn't had her, I'd be driving one."

It's not easy, particularly in today's world, to be a Dad or a Mom for that matter. Kids today expect so much. I personally like comedian Phyllis Diller's comment. She said, "I want my children to have all the things I couldn't afford. Then I going to move in with them."

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Our text for the day isn't designed specifically for fathers. It is designed, rather, for followers of Jesus Christ, which hopefully our Dads and our Moms are. The Master is talking about the kingdom of God and he speaks hopeful words about the days ahead. He says, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?"

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It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth.

Slide #4

Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."

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The mustard plant is really more of a large shrub, and in that part of the world it is the largest of all the shrubs. It is large enough for birds to nestle in its branches. The point of the parable is that from a tiny seed major accomplishments may emerge.

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An example of that growth is the story of the early church. It began with only the Master and twelve disciples and an unknown number of women. We must not forget the women; they were there from the very beginning giving their support, sharing their witness. But look at how much that tiny group has grown.

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It is estimated that there are now 2.1 billion (yes, billion) Christians in the world (about one third of the total population of the planet), and we are still growing. While it is true that churches in the West have slowed their growth, and some churches have actually declined, there are places, particularly in Asia and South America, where the Gospel is exploding. From the smallest of seeds, the mightiest of all plants has grown.

But the church is itself a seed. God planted us in the world to make a difference in the world. And even though we have been a flawed group of people through the ages, the influence that this group of people has had upon our world cannot be overstated.

Many of the values of Western civilization are rooted in Jesus and the Scriptures. For example, all the hospitals in America were originally Christian hospitals. All the colleges in America were originally Christian colleges. The civil rights movement had its origin in the Scriptures. We are continually reminded of how male-oriented the scriptures are, but tell me any religion on earth that has freed as many women as Jesus has.

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As one observer has noted, even our system of government is a product of those values. Where did our Constitution come from? It was authored by Thomas Jefferson. Where did he get his ideas? The French Enlightenment. Where did the French Enlightenment get its ideas? The Renaissance. Where did the Renaissance get its ideas? The Reformation. Where did the Reformation get its ideas? From the Bible. (2)

A tiny seed planted more than two thousand years ago is slowly changing the world. Not as quickly as God would like. Sometimes Christian people are a barrier rather than a bridge to a better world. Still, that seed is growing until the day comes when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:8-11). There is indeed power in what we might call “mustard seed faith.”

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As parents, we see the power of mustard seed faith all the time. A baby is born into a household. Can you imagine the significance of that event? Every baby born into this world represents hope for a new beginning.

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It is said that Queen Victoria was fascinated by the brilliance of the scholars who made up England’s Royal Society.

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On one occasion she whispered to Prime Minister John Bright, “Where do all these learned men come from?” Bright replied, “From babies, your Majesty, from babies.” Every time a baby is born into the world a potential mustard seed of greatness is planted.

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It’s like a small church in rural Kentucky which over the years has produced several outstanding clergy. While interviewing a new slate of pastoral candidates, a member of the search committee mentioned the former pastors from that small church who had gone on to serve in prominent church positions--one as president of a seminary, another pastor of a large city church, and a third as president of the denomination. “How in the world did you find so many potentially great men in this little church?” the astonished candidate asked.

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“Find them!” said the committee member. “We didn’t find them. We made them!” (3)
And of course that committee member was right. Our children are our most important product as a church. Children are often the mustard seed that our church is sowing. If we do our job right, they will be ambassadors of Christ making the Kingdom of God ever more of a reality in a world which badly needs saving.

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Dr. Fred Craddock, the eminent retired seminary professor who has influenced so many pastors across our land once told of the teacher who most influenced him. Her name was, “Miss Emma Sloan.” Miss Sloan was an elderly woman, single. She taught him in the primary department, and every year, Miss Sloan would be moved up to the next level to teach and so she went right on with them, and taught them for years.

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She gave him a Bible. In the front of it she wrote: “May this be a light to your feet, a lamp for your path. Emma Sloan.”

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She taught the children to memorize the Bible; she never tried to interpret it. Craddock says he doesn’t remember her ever explaining anything. She said, “Just put it in your heart, just put it in your heart.” She used the alphabet, and they’d go around the room saying verses that began with each letter.

(Click) “A--A soft answer turns away wrath. **(Click)** B--Be ye kind, one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, as God also in Christ has forgiven you. **(Click)** C--Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden. **(Click)** D--Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. **(Click)** E--Every good and perfect gift . . . **(Click)** F--For God so loved the world . . .”

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Craddock says he can still remember those verses. Miss Emma didn’t explain what the verses meant. She just sowed those seeds of Scripture in their hearts. We learned those verses and then recited them before the adults on Sunday afternoon. “I can’t think of anything, anything in all my life that has made such a radical difference as those verses,” says Fred Craddock. “The Spirit of God brings them to my mind appropriately, time and time and time again.” (6)

So many people ask, what great thing can I do for God? I can’t be an overseas missionary. I don’t have the resources to do much to feed the hungry. But every one of us can provide the proper environment for children or youth to grow in an atmosphere of love, support

and spiritual guidance. Our children are the mustard seeds that God has provided us. We are to love them, nurture them and help them be all God intended them to be.

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“What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

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Someone summed up mustard seed faith like this: “The Son of Man grew up in a despised province; he did not appear in public until his thirtieth year; then taught for three years in neighboring villages, and occasionally at Jerusalem; made a few converts, chiefly among the poor and unlearned;

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And then falling into the hands of his enemies, died the shameful death of the cross; such, and so slight, was the commencement of the kingdom of God. A tiny mustard seed sown in the ground.

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But God brought Christ forth from the grave. And then those who had learned from him spread his story. And today two thousand years later here we sit telling that same story, sowing the seed again and again. Chief among our duties is to make certain that people we come into contact with, whether young or old, are well seeded with the story so that they make it their own and pass it to the next generation. What a grand privilege. What a purpose that is for a life.

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Some of you might remember the movie some years back, *Oh, God!* starring George Burns, as God and John Denver, who played a grocery store manager named Jerry. One day God decides to communicate his love to the world through Jerry. Jerry, with much reluctance, holds a news conference to deliver God’s message. This lands him in a courtroom where God must take the stand in his defense.

After all is said and done and the movie begins to wind down, the two evaluate the success of their mission. Denver, the manager, judges it to be an absolute failure. But Burns says, “Oh, I don’t think so. You never know; a seed here and a seed there, something will catch hold and grow.”

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The Kingdom is growing. Sometimes it appears very small. At other times, its huge and very visible. But there is power here, unlimited and everlasting power in a tiny mustard seed.