

Shepherd of the Hills
Youth Sunday Sermon
July 26, 2020
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Jesus and his parables. What a guy. Spectacular dude! Just such strange teaching methods...

This Gospel reading has numerous parables in it. I'm going to talk about the mustard seed one.

Ugh. Lydia! Not the mustard seed one AGAIN! I've already heard it SO MANY times!!!
Well... I'm sorry, but that's just because there are so many different interpretations of it. Again, Jesus and his parables...

The parable of the mustard seed: I'm sure you've all heard it, and I'm sure you've all heard at least one interpretation of it. I'll start out by telling you the one you have probably already heard:

The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It has very small beginnings. The Kingdom started out really small, with only a few preachers (this is WAY long ago). Since then, it has grown. The Kingdom of God now spans all throughout the entire world! This is much like the mustard seed that started out really small, but grew to be a large shrub, a tree actually, as Jesus called it, it's really a shrub though, but I won't get all hung up on a technicality. Anyway, this tiny seed growing into a great shrub is very similar to our faith. Our faith starts out very small, but we grow. We grow into people of really strong faith, like the mustard shrub.

This is a good interpretation. I do like it. But, there are more than just that one. Allow me to offer another one of those translations.

The mustard seed. Such a tiny little thing, isn't it? But if it's cared for, given rich soil to bury its roots in, fresh water to drink, sunlight for energy and a little bit of TLC, it'll grow into this magnificent mustard shrub! So what now? Now the shrub has these large, sturdy, and beautiful branches that birds come and make nests on. This shrub is a safe haven for them, and because of this shrub, these birds are able to live a wonderful life.

The key part of this situation is the caretaker of the seed. Without the caretaker, this teeny tiny little seed can't get very far. The seed is left all alone with whatever hand it's dealt. If that seed was thrown into rich soil with water and sunlight, it will grow. If not, there are various outcomes that aren't as great as the former.

Maybe there is soil and water, but there is little sunlight, so the plant is unable to grow very big or tall. Maybe there is not enough water, in which case the plant will wilt and turn brown. Maybe the soil isn't deep enough, in which case the plant is unable to grow properly, it may fall or get knocked over by a passerby.

This is really unfortunate for our little mustard seed. Now it can't grow into a strong shrub because of conditions outside of their control. Our little mustard seed that started out so tiny, will never get their chance to grow into something magnificent that benefits many around them, like the birds. The birds no longer have somewhere to build their nests and raise their own offspring.

Where is our caretaker? Where did they go? How come they decided to help that mustard seed and not this one? That doesn't seem very fair...

Let's apply this analogy to ourselves. Who in this story represents us? The mustard seed... the caretaker... the birds... the shrub...

All of the above, actually.

Wait, how is that possible?

There are a lot of different combinations of who plays who in this analogy, and any one of them could be true depending on the situation. One way to interpret this analogy is to say that we are the mustard seeds, and God is our caretaker. That seems like the most logical one. But then when we get to the mustard seeds that don't get the TLC that the others do, that interpretation kind of falls apart, because God doesn't just pick and choose.

So who's the caretaker then? Who are the seeds?

I am. And so are you. ALL of you. Sometimes we are the caretaker, and sometimes we are a seed, or a shrub.

So now that you're a caretaker, who are your seeds? I'll give you a moment to think about that.

A lot of you probably thought of your children, younger family members, and friends. Makes sense.

Like I mentioned a moment ago, sometimes we are the seeds. We've all had caretakers. Who would that be for you?

Other than God, my parents are the first to come to mind as my caretakers, as is probably the case for a lot of you too. I also think of my siblings, friends, teachers, and a lot of people who have helped me in life.

Circling back to being caretakers, think again about other seeds or plants you care for. And, what about the seeds that we don't care for?

Not all of the seeds get thrown into soil like some did. Some seeds are thrown and they land on a rock, in the shade, or in a place with no water. Some people are born into poverty. Born into a life where their parents can't raise them. Born to be in a constant cycle of hunger, or sadness, or hardships. Born in a war-torn country. Born into a place

surrounded by violence, crime, and gang activity. Born into racial injustice. Born into a life where nobody will ever hear them or care about them.

But these are mustard seeds all the same! And so are the people! They just haven't been blessed with the conditions to flourish like the other mustard seeds. So what now?

Are these mustard seeds, that are no different than the others, doomed to stay little forever? Will they never get to grow into a great shrub?

Will these people never make it out of poverty? Make it out of the dangerous place they live? Will their voices ever be heard? Will they ever receive help or support? Will they ever get the love that they need to grow into loving people?

They're just a mustard seed, after all. There are already 7.8 billion of them. Over 200 thousand are added each day. They won't matter in the long run anyways, right?

But what if a caretaker shows up? What if someone goes over and picks up that tiny little mustard seed. That tiny little seed that wouldn't even be *noticed* if someone were to walk by. But they're spotted, somehow, by someone who cares, and sees the potential in this little seed. They see what beautiful things could come from this tiny seed.

Jesus told his disciples a parable (two parables, actually) about how great things can come from something so tiny. One seed, one person, it doesn't seem like either will make much of a difference. But how would we ever find out if we don't try?

If we don't try, we'll never get to see all the beautiful birds that nest in the shrub's branches.

If we don't try, we'll never get to breath the clean air that the shrub's green leaves produce.

If we don't try, that mustard seed will never reach adulthood and make more seeds, to make more shrubs, for more birds, and more clean air.

But even before trying, we have to SEE the mustard seed. We have to see the people that need our help. We need to see that they are there. We need to see the struggles they face and have empathy for them. We need to see through all their labels that society puts on them, and see their potential.

There are people in our world, our country, our neighborhood, that are calling out to be heard and to be seen. If nobody ever sees them, or hears them, or tells them that someone cares, they can't grow. And we will never see the amazing person that God has put on this Earth. They will never get the opportunity to love others the way that God teaches us to. Why are we preventing that? Why would we prevent a person from being able to live out a strong, loving, and faithful life? If it only took a little nudge to get the seed into good soil, or a couple drops of water to change that mustard seed's life, we'd barely be sacrificing anything, why don't we do it?

So, if you ever find a mustard seed, go ahead and sow it. Water it and give it some sunshine and love. You never know what beautiful shrub it may grow into.