

**“Tell Me the Stories of Jesus;
Parables that Challenge, Convict and Comfort”
“Small Seeds, Big Potentials”**

We began a new sermon series “Tell Me the Stories of Jesus; Parables that Challenge, Convict and Comfort.” Using Amy-Jill Levine’s book *Short Stories by Jesus* as a springboard, this series will help us look at the stories Jesus told in new ways. Jesus’ listeners may and probably did hear these stories very differently than we do in the twenty-first century. The week’s parable is not about “seeds” but about a seed, a mustard seed. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record this story of Jesus, it’s quite short, but has many interpretations. In this parable, it is all about the seed, the tree and the birds. Jesus also notes in Matthew 17, “If we have faith the size of mustard seed...” We could do great things. So the seed, the growth and the outcome is about how the reign of God is already here and growing. This week, may the seed help us focus on what God can and will do in our life together.---Pastor Cindy

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“Small Seeds, Big Potentials”**

Prayer for the Week

God of small seeds and mighty plants, you take our meager lives and with your love cause them to produce acts of loving kindness for you in this world. You hear our cries and find us when we are lost and wandering in fear. You bring us home with you so that we may be made whole, rejoicing in your goodness. Help us to joyfully serve you all our days, knowing that you are always watching over us. Prepare our hearts to receive your word and our spirits to respond in eagerness to serve you. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen. (Written by Nancy C. Townley)

This week’s sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

Study Guide

Monday, 7/09/17 Matthew 13: 31-32

This parable is the beginning of several parables about smaller things: pearls, yeast and a treasure. Scholars say many things about this short parable including that the mustard plant is tenacious and weed-like (and so should our faith be) and out of small things come big things (lots of success.) This parable is more than a seed and a bush or plant, it also is large enough for the birds to come and nest. Someone intentionally planted this seed in a field, and when it had grown, it provided shelter. Maybe the kingdom of heaven is a constant work of planting, caring, harvesting and creating space. The kingdom is always growing, and inviting us to provide for others as well as for ourselves. *Today, say a prayer and ask God to be planting love and grace in your heart and spirit.*

Tuesday, 7/10/17 Romans 8: 1-4

These words come right after Paul's words describing his struggle to do what is right and good. He thanks God for the grace and love he has received in Christ Jesus. Every person struggles to live lives of grace, truth and love. The Spirit has given freedom to believers through Christ. God has done this so that we, who follow Jesus are not caught up in the chains of our sin and failures. Now, because of what has happened in Christ, people live lives of the Spirit rather than selfishness. The mustard seed of faith grows and enables people to see beyond their own needs and to see the needs of others. *Today, say a prayer of thanks for the grace and love you have received from God.*

Wednesday, 7/11/17 Romans 8: 5-8

Paul goes into more depth on how the Spirit leads a person out of selfishness and sin. The Spirit, Paul writes, "leads to life and peace. So the attitude that comes from selfishness is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's Law, because it can't. (Common English Bible) Paul doesn't say this, but the attitude of selfishness limits the point of view and the ability to think and act bigger than ourselves. Like a small seed planted, as it grows, it is able to produce and offer more. As the mustard grew into a bush, then it was capable of creating a home for the birds. The Spirit of God opens minds, hearts and spirits and offers the believer part of building a kingdom where all can dwell. *How are you growing in your faith? How is your faith contributing to the kingdom of God?*

Thursday, 7/12/17 Romans 8: 9-11

People who have a relationship with Christ aren't "self-centered". God's Spirit lives in them. Now, if people are honest, that may not always be true. Sometimes believers are selfish. The promise is that the Spirit will live in the faithful and because of that Spirit, they can grow, learn and deepen their faith. A mustard seed that is planted doesn't turn into a bush big enough for birds to nest in overnight. It takes time and during that time the kingdom is already here. Each mustard plant enlarges the kingdom so more and more can make their home in the midst of the loving reign of God. *How do you allow God's Spirit to guide you out of your selfishness and into the grace filled kingdom of God?*

07/13/17 Matthew 17: 20

In this saying of Jesus, he uses the image of the mustard seed to speak of faith and what faith can do. The disciples had not been able to perform a healing and Jesus is a bit frustrated. Jesus claims that the disciples have "little faith." If you have faith the size of a mustard seed...you can move mountains. This is a different image than the parable in the 13th chapter. And yet, perhaps not so different. Faith requires planting, and it requires work and discipline. Like any small seed, it first must be planted and tended. The faith of mustard begins first with faith. *How is it with your soul this week? How are you tending to your faith?*