

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

Father's Day

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Ezekiel 17:22-24

Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15

II Corinthians 5:6-10 [11-13] 14-17

Mark 4:26-34

06/17/2018

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

26[Jesus] said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground,
27and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know
how. 28The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.
29But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

30He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use
for it? 31It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the
seeds on earth; 32yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts
forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

33With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34he did
not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Something Small

Good morning! It started out small, just a small group of friends who gathered together on the beach in San Francisco to “burn the man.” The organizer had had a tough year, and when he heard about this ancient festival, he couldn’t pass it up. The burning of “the man” was an old pagan festival where the community would gather around a straw and wood man on one evening and symbolically put all their pain, all their suffering and shame upon the “man” who was then lit, and as it burned, it took all your anxiety and suffering with it. It’s a beautiful idea, and on those beaches in California something new was born. “Burning Man” is an annual celebration now, and it quickly got bigger than what San Francisco could handle. Their current location is on the Black Rock Desert about 120 miles north of Reno, Nevada and boy, do they gather a crowd. The numbers shift from year to year but you can usually expect to see 50,000 people descend upon the playa where the event is held. Now, the event has become famous for what we’ll call its casual attitude towards illegal substances, just imagine 1960’s hippies to get a better idea, but the goal is always the same. Come together to put your pain and suffering upon the man, and watch him burn. It’s a ceremony rich with cross imagery.

It started out small, just a whisper spoken about a husband because someone saw something out of context. But the damage was done, the whisper soon started to be spoken more loudly, and yet it was always behind the husband and wife’s back. The people who spread the

gossip had no idea that it was untrue, but they lacked the courage to ask the husband and so the disease spread. It didn't take long for the rumor to get around to the wife, where it took hold. She started to second guess everything the husband did. She had tried to dismiss it at first but he HAD been late coming home last Thursday... what was going on? She became more and more suspicious of her husband who in turn became more and more angry at her behavior that was gradually changing from what he had known for so long. The fights started to happen not long after that, with the husband storming out and leaving, which only fueled the wife's distrust even more. By the end of the year the relationship was a marriage only in word, they no longer talked, and by the following Christmas their kids had to try and celebrate in two different houses.

Small things can have a powerful effect on all of us, whether that be for good or bad. Jesus knew that, and we see it in today's gospel lesson. The mustard seed, while small, can be a powerful thing. Within that tiny seed is the potential for great things. Dr. Matt Skinner, the professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. talks about the irony of the parable we have today.¹ Jesus knew it wasn't the tiniest seed, and he knew that the bush wasn't the greatest of shrubs, and the crowds knew it too. But they all knew that the shrub was tough, it grew EVERYWHERE! The mustard seed, with a Latin name I can't pronounce, would have called to mind for the listeners of Jesus the same type images that would come to mind if I talked about kudzu, if kudzu had medicinal properties. There's another story of something small too. Due to an attempt to help with soil erosion in the United States during the 1930's and 1940's, the

¹https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3676

plant has taken over in the south, spreading by some estimates at 150,000 acres a year.² One decision can have a huge impact on our future.

Which brings me to a sermon I heard about the other day. Travis was in the church on Friday and as he was running around the sanctuary, he stopped to give a short sermon from the pulpit. According to sources who witnessed the event... Sue... the sermon went like this: “Jesus is in our hearts. Amen”

Such a small thing, but boy, does it have potential! I want you to think about that, to truly take those words to... well your heart, I guess, because we all have a decision to make. Will we stand for the good that has been shown us in the person of Jesus Christ? Or will we let ourselves be overcome by the struggle against sin? So often in our lives we feel like the bad news outweighs the good news, but I'm not so sure. Did you know that from a psychological perspective it takes over twice the amount of good things to outweigh our perception of the bad? I was once told by a counselor that it takes 7 years of healthy relationships to outweigh one year of abuse in a child. I think there are wonderful tiny things that happen all the time all around us, we just think they're too small and insignificant to make a difference. While walking with Christ is just as much about advocating against the large systems that exist in the world, it's also about doing the little things, like returning your cart after you shop or picking up that piece of trash everyone walks right past. They are all signs of the Kingdom of God.

There's this hashtag that I sometimes keep an eye out for it's called #showerthoughts. It's about those random bits of brilliance that seem to come to our minds when we're in the shower. And one of them has been stuck in my head for the longest time. Have you ever noticed how

²<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kudzu>

people in time travel movies are always super careful about each little thing they do because of the potential for huge impacts in the future? But why doesn't anyone believe that the little things we do now can have the same impact too? The common example that is often used is the person who goes back in time, steps on some fern and kills it, and travels back (which I guess is forward?) in time only to discover that wheel was never invented. But we never use that type of thinking when it comes to our future! Just imagine the seeds of hope and goodness that Christ is calling on us to plant in the gardens of the world. Those tiny events have potential to grow and change everything we know! It's so easy to think that our work is just too small and insignificant to actually cause anything to change, but God's work is never small, and we participate in the building of the Kingdom when we take on that great work. So don't lose heart, because as one preacher said, Jesus is in our hearts, and that means anything is possible. Amen.