

Thomas R. Cook
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
8:00 and 10:00 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist
The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost; June 17, 2018

“From the Tiniest of Seeds...”

Scripture: Mark 4:26-34; 4 Pentecost B (Proper 6B) RCL

Be warned, people... I've got a mustard seed, and I'm not afraid to use it!

You have a mustard seed too. All of us do. All of us, I believe, have that tiniest potential of the Kingdom of God wrapped up within our layers of human complexity, our conglomeration of personality, talents, skills, experiences, our busyness, hopes, dreams, successes, failures, doubts, and faith. Somewhere inside everything that makes us “us” is the Kingdom of God, hidden, perhaps, tiny, but waiting to sprout and grow. I don't think we had to do anything to get that way. It's with us when we come into the world. What we have to do is be willing for it to show up.

And show up it does, in ways from the simple to the sublime. How? Not too long ago David Cooper made a simple invitation to our congregation: Donate your used shoes, so they can be provided to people who need them. I'm sure David was hoping we would see a decent number of shoes come into the church, dozens at least.

Well, over 600 pairs came in! Over 600 pairs were collected in just a matter of days. From a simple request. And not only are the shoes put to good use by others, but by selling them for only a few dollars, the money raised through the donation of shoes is used by *Good in the Hood Ministries* to purchase food to provide meals to families in great need. All from a simple idea and a simple request and a simple action on the part of you. From the tiniest of seeds...

Yesterday, members of our faith community took part in a concert by the *Giving Voices Chorus*. *Giving Voices* is an organization that started from a simple idea: music continues to have tremendous effects for good upon people suffering in various stages of dementia. Something about music still makes its way to centers of memory, joy, and emotional motivation in the lives of Alzheimer's patients. And so a couple of enterprising people founded the *Giving Voices Chorus* in 2014 to provide an opportunity for people living with dementia, and those who care for them, to simply... sing! A few years later over 100 people were a part of *Giving Voices*. And yesterday, 170 voices were set to sing over nine new songs composed just for them. The show held at the Ordway Theatre in St. Paul was sold out. From the tiniest of seeds...

In the late 1980s I met a young doctor who started a medical ministry to homeless people living under the highway overpasses in Miami, Florida. He literally

went out almost daily, medical bag and supplies in hand, and called on and cared for the homeless population wherever he could find them. Eventually, others took notice of this man's efforts, and they banded together to form what would become the *Camillus Health Concern*, the only organization devoted solely to health care for homeless people in south Florida. On a whim, I went to the internet this morning to see what had become of *Camillus Health* after nearly 30 years. I saw what I expected... It's going strong, serving almost 6,000 patients annually, numerous physicians and health care specialists providing services ranging from dental care to mental health. And if that patient cannot afford to pay anything, they are cared for at no charge. It started with one willing young doctor. From the tiniest of seeds...

I know... these are tremendous, apparent, maybe what we would call "successful," examples of that greatest of shrubs of which Jesus speaks when he speaks of the Kingdom of God. But not everyone will start a *Camillus Health Concern* or a *Giving Voices Choir*. And not everyone needs to. The point isn't found in the accomplishment. It's found in acting on the opportunity. People sowed the seeds of the Kingdom of God in hope and generosity in the simplest of ways. They didn't necessarily begin with a vision of magnitude, rather with tiniest hope that something good, something helpful might come of their offering. They had a mustard seed, people, and they weren't afraid to use it.

Now, I notice that Jesus gives us *two* parables this morning. While the Kingdom of God is like the mustard seed, the tiniest of grains that becomes the largest of shrubs, in the first parable Jesus reminds us that it isn't by our control or understanding that the seeds we sow become the things they are meant to be. The sower sows the seeds, yet the seeds do the becoming much on their own, becoming what they are supposed to be, ---we don't necessarily know how. The sower cultivates, cares for, nurtures the seeds, but they grow on their own power and purpose until they become what they need to be. What do we do with our seeds? Well, that's the point...

An aspiring younger fellow wanted to learn something of the vocation of farming, so he asked a farmer, "How's your wheat this year?" And the farmer replied, "Didn't plant any. Wasn't sure we'd get enough rain." So the young man asked, "Well, then, your corn. How's your corn coming up?" And the farmer said, "Didn't plant corn this year. Too many diseases." So, the young man asked, "Alfalfa?" "No, didn't plant any. Prices are down." "Potatoes?" Too much blight. "Pumpkin's?" Not enough room. "Well," the young man asked, "what did you plant?" And the so-called farmer said, "Nothing." And that's just what he grew.*

* From a story in Synthesis for June 17, 2108.

We have the seeds of the Kingdom within us. In a way, those seeds are us. But we have to be willing to sow those seeds. Use them for good in ways that may be small or great. We need not worry that they will become something big, or whether they get noticed, or how everything will work out. Just start sowing. Where there is a need for kindness, show it. Where there is an opportunity when you can help someone, help. If you get a chance to be generous, be generous. Who knows what will grow even from the tiniest of actions?

Now, I know this sounds pretty simple, because maybe it is. I notice that Mark's Gospel tells us that Jesus spoke only in parables with the people, and people were often confused, but "...he explained everything in private to his disciples." Now that would have been a helpful conversation to record. Us smart seminary types have been trying to figure out these complex, puzzling parables for a couple thousand years, and I guess we're still working on it. But I wouldn't be surprised if Jesus' explanations given the disciples in private were any more enlightening than the parables themselves. Some things you just got to get a feel for. I've heard it said that the way we make life so difficult and confusing... that's the paradox, that's the puzzle. The parables are just Jesus telling us like it really is: Use what you have to do what is good, and God will take the tiniest offering and make it something grand and useful.

You've got a mustard seed, people. So don't be afraid to use it.