

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 26, 2020, Year A

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-50

"From Small Beginnings"

When Deacon Bob was reading the Holy Gospel about the fishermen casting their nets and pulling in a large haul and separating the good fish from the bad, but it brought to mind how we were talking to our kids about a week ago on Zoom – we like to do that weekly – we got to talking about fishing and how my Dad owned a boat. We quite often would go out fishing together, and in the Great South Bay of Long Island, we would occasionally pull in a really ugly fish – with spines all over it. You could not grab it because it would hurt you. It was called a Sea Robbin. So I sent them a picture and their comments were – “ooh that is nasty!” The Lord will forgive me for this one – I would carry a small baseball bat and swing at it to knock it back into the water – to live again – a little stunned – but to live again. (sometimes the lips were left behind – but...)

When you hear the Gospel – our minds are taken to different place, and that is just as the Lord has designed it. Last week we spoke about separating the wheat and the weeds and at the end of today's Gospel reading – Jesus is talking about the good fish being kept and the bad fish being thrown away – I cannot help it. And so it is with each one of us – the Gospel speak to each of us in different ways. He said, *“This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* (Matthew 13:49-50) I do not know about you – but I have been on a very cold day where my teeth a chattering – I do not want gnashing of teeth and I do not want weeping. Crying is not my favorite thing to do. That is why we stay close to Jesus and ask for His grace and His Mercy.

In today's Holy Gospel from Matthew 13:31-33 Jesus said *“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”* These same words are recorded in Mark 4:31-32. And also in Matthew 17:20 Jesus replied to a question, *“Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”* What makes that happen? Faith – absolute Faith.

So why did Jesus pick out a mustard seed as an illustration? We have so many instant things in foods and electronics – everybody has a cell phone; but in Jesus' day almost everyone had their own garden – and no means of communication. In first century Israel, an important part of the garden was the mustard plant. The mustard plant was well known because it helped combat disease, was a potent anti-venom medicine, was a powerful spice, and held a great deal of potential – including growing into a tree as shelter for birds.

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From very simple beginnings we see followers of Jesus – the church, just like the mustard seed expand and grow, spread all over the world. God used the original 12 apostles to start global evangelism – getting the Word out. He can use us too if we are willing to help spread His seed.

Last week I preached about Jesus' Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds – where the fields are laced with weeds in among the precious wheat. Jesus made clear that the weeds – the non-believers will one day be pulled up along with the wheat – but then they will be separated and cast into the eternal fire. As I said last week – watch out for the weeds – they are all around us, in our town, in our county, in our country and in our world – and we need to be able to recognize the difference. I reminded you last week about how “some ‘progressive thinkers’ want to say either that God would never judge or condemn anyone or that He will postpone the harvest until every single weed has somehow been turned ‘magically’ into wheat.” Let me say this – God does not do magic! God performs miracles, as each one of us can attest to in our lives – He is not a magician!

If there is someone preaching a ‘social Gospel’ that is tailored to catch up with the trends of the culture – then they are preaching a false Gospel. That is not what Jesus taught. The truth is that Holy Scripture – God’s Holy Word should dictate to the society and the culture; not the other way around, not the culture transforming the Word into something different. This problem has been around since the early church; Jesus warned us and it was further reiterated by the Apostle Paul who was truly clear about following any other Gospel than the one true Gospel of Jesus Christ. In Galatians chapter one, Paul writes “*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse! Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*” (Galatians 1:6-10) Don’t those words truly fit today?

There is only one Gospel and Jesus words are truth. The world around us is a mixture of wheat and weeds – and as Jesus commanded us in last week’s Gospel - ‘*He who has ears, let him hear.*’ I want to suggest to you that we also need to have eyes to see and be aware of the spiritual warfare that exists all around us – so that we can pray for peace and protection – as well as wisdom and knowledge to combat it, and rebuke it.

Jesus is giving us an example that faith as small as a mustard seed can and does move mountains – which are the works of the evil one. The tiny little mustard seed grows into a tree – a safe haven for birds, and as I mentioned earlier the seed has many important uses.

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So many think of themselves as being too small or too insignificant to be able to make a difference? Too many people look in the mirror they are not happy with what they see. Just last week I reminded you that we are made in God's image and likeness – and we are to reflect who He is. At first it might seem that we have no effect on anything or anyone, but if we persistently continue to sow the smallest of seeds and repeat the process faithfully, we will soon begin to see the effects of our small beginnings being repeated and the results increasingly becoming larger.

Like my sermon of a few weeks ago about the four soils – we pray that God will show us to recognize and minister to the good soil – caring and nurturing the seeds of faith that we have planted – and asking the Holy Spirit to make it grow.

Jesus points to the uniqueness of faith and what a treasure it is in God's Kingdom. He speaks about yeast, often used to illustrate sin in Scripture – but here Jesus speaks about the blessing that yeast is, the ingredient that makes dough rise into bread. It is amazing what this dough becomes – it is much lighter and much larger. Faith is like that too, when we treat it as a precious treasure to share with others – we can see the effects grow. Its yield will be much larger than we even imagined. Somebody had to introduce Billy Graham to Jesus – and look what happened. Call it a ripple effect – you know you tell two friends, and they tell two friends and so on. If we can watch the kingdom grow when we have the faith enough to share it with somebody – it becomes much larger – larger than we ever could have possibly imagined.

Every believer in Jesus is its own mustard seed. All we need to do is to sow and then pray for the harvest. The Risen Jesus, just days before He ascended to the Father, was on a mountain in the Galilee and He gave us His command for all believers to act upon – sowing the seed of faith as recorded in Matthew 28:19-20. You know it as the Great Commission. Jesus said “*therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (here is the part where we come in) and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (We are not doing this alone because as Jesus said) And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” We are not in this alone. As I said last week and the week before – it is about Him – not about us.

None of us can save a soul – but we can introduce them to the truth – like sowing a seed. You can remind them of the truth that they may have fallen away from that they loved when they were younger. You can show them what it means to be a Christian. Remember, you are not doing this alone! He is with us always, to the very end of the age.