

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

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

***"Small Beginnings"***

Jesus' teachings were as revolutionary then – just as they are today in our increasingly secular society. The most important point of Jesus' mention of the mustard seed is for us to be comparing the tiny seed to the greatness of what can come from it. It is all about potential for Kingdom building from small beginnings. Shocking results came from such a small seed which was expected to yield nothing. "It's tiny, what could it possibly do?" But Jesus said the mustard seed produced a plant, actually a tree which became greater than all herbs or garden plants. In Luke 13:19 Jesus described the kingdom of God saying: *"It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches."*

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."*

So why did Jesus use a mustard seed? Today in our 'on demand society' we have canned this, bottled that, and packaged food; we have so many ready to eat things that we can just toss in the microwave or a boil a bag, but in Jesus' day almost everyone had their own garden. An important part of the garden in Jesus' day was the mustard plant. The mustard plant was well known because helped combat disease, was a potent anti-venom, was a powerful spice that woke up a bland dinner for the poor, and held a great deal of potential – including shelter for birds.

From simple beginnings we see the gospel of Jesus Christ, just like the mustard seed expand and grow, spread all over the world. God used the original 12 apostles to start global evangelism. And you know what - He can use us too if we are willing to become 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 is clear that the weeds – or non-believers will one day be pulled up along with the wheat – but then they will be separated – with the weeds being cast into the eternal fire. Please understand – there are weeds 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 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."

My friends, that is pure “weed speak.” Let me explain: Jesus’ words are clear and anything that is different from what He says is NOT His Gospel! If there is someone preaching a ‘social Gospel’ that is tailored to catch up with the trends and desires of the culture – then they are preaching a false Gospel. It is supposed to be 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 is not something new – this problem has been around since the early church – and before as Jesus warned and further reiterated by the Apostle Paul who was very clear about following any other Gospel than the one true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Please open your pew Bibles to page 1807 – to Paul’s letter to the Galatians chapter 1. 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) Powerful words that fit in today’s world.

There is only ONE Gospel and the Words of Jesus 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 around us – so that we can pray for peace and protection – as well as wisdom and knowledge to combat it, and rebuke it.

So where does the mustard seed come in with all of this? Jesus is giving us an example that faith as small as a mustard seed can and does move mountains – the works of evil. The tiny little mustard seed grows into a safe haven for birds, and as I mentioned earlier the seed has many important uses. I put a picture of a hand holding a tiny mustard seed in your Bulletin. Some of you may cook with mustard seeds – McCormick has a whole jar of them in your friendly neighborhood supermarket. This tiny seed is just beginning to make a difference.

How often do we think of ourselves as being too small or too insignificant to be able to make a difference? I know the hearts of many people in this world – and when they look in the mirror they are not happy with what they see. Remember last week I talked about us being made in God’s image and likeness – and we are to be a reflection of who He is – to the world and in our lives. And so I ask you today, and I ask the Lord today – that the next time you look in the mirror that you would see yourself as He sees you; that you would have eyes to see – and be pleased with who God made that is standing in front of the mirror. 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.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 30, 2017, Year A

Like with our 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 – asking the Holy Spirit to make it grow.

In the other parables of this Gospel reading, Jesus points to the uniqueness of faith and what a treasure it is in God's Kingdom. He speaks about yeast – which has often been used to illustrate sin in Scripture – but here Jesus speaks about the blessing that yeast is – as it is the catalyst that makes bread – bread. If you don't have yeast in the bread it is just dough! It is like pita bread – unleavened bread. When we attentively follow directions – and have the patience to allow the yeast to add its unique quality to the dough – letting it rise – needing the dough – and once again having the patience to let it rise again – the finished product – or outcome is very different than when it began. It is amazing what this dough becomes – it is much lighter and much larger. So too is faith when we treat it as a precious treasure to share with others – its yield will be much larger than expected.

Life comes from life! The vitality and growth of the Body of Christ comes from sharing our faith and relationship with others - and submitting to His Lordship and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. I love it when people come into my office and tell me how they have had the opportunity to speak with someone who was really hurting. "I shared the love of Christ and His Gospel - and oh, by the way do you have another copy of the 'Bible Promise Book that you give out?'" I said "sure" and gave one to them. That is sharing the Gospel – it doesn't have to be standing on the street corner - and thumping on the Bible – not it can be just a smile – or a touch on the shoulder and saying that "I haven't seen you in a long time." You know – there is some good religion going on at Harvey's and even at Walmart! Sharing – and that yield is going to be incredible.

Every member is its own mustard seed. All each believer has 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 desire for believers to act upon – sowing the seed of faith as recorded in Matthew 28:19-20. 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 Jesus said) And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*"

You can't save a soul – but you can introduce them to the truth. You can remind them of the truth that maybe they fell away from that they loved when they were a child. You can show them what it means to be a Christian. You are not doing this alone!

And so my brothers and sisters – we are to be obedient; we are to wait and pray about small beginnings.