

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 17:5-10

***"The Mustard Seed"***

Sometimes things are not what they appear to be. The mustard seed has been used for a long time to describe the amount of faith you would need to be used by God. They are that small! If you have ever seen a mustard seed, and I have used them in Confirmation classes, the reaction is 'this isn't worth much' – and my response is 'wait - there is more to this story.'

Let me tell you about this man who went into the hospital to have major surgery. He was informed about his odds for success and he knew that it might be touch and go. The man decided to go ahead and have the surgery anyway. After the surgery he was sent to the recovery room. As he began to wake up, groggy, from the anesthesia - he noticed that the curtains were closed. He called the nurse who explained to him that she decided to close the curtains because there was a huge fire raging across the street. She said that she knew that he was apprehensive about the surgery and she did not want him to wake up and think that surgery had failed and that the flames would mean that he had died and gone to – well you know (the subject of last week's sermon). Things are not always as they appear.

You have to agree with me that we live in a world of "the bigger the better," and people are led to believe that a small church is not significant or might not even have a role to play in bringing forth God's Kingdom; the "bigger the better!" If I took a poll right now and asked you when you were growing up 'did you have a 55 inch television?' 'Maybe a 15 inch television?' How many people when they were growing up didn't even have a color TV? Color TV didn't really come out until late in the 60's; 66 I think. Even then if you got a big TV it was a monstrosity. We had one of those, Marilyn and I, but we left it in Western New York; we were not bringing it all the way down here; it was way too big and too old. The bigger the better is not always true.

Think for a minute - the religious movement that Jesus initiated seemed insignificant to those on the outside. "He's just one of those guys claiming to be the Messiah!" There was nothing magnificent or grand about the kingdom that Jesus and his small band of 12 disciples represented. Christianity could be described as having had a small and obscure beginning. Even Jesus' teachings raised some eyebrows.

- I mean - who ever heard of loving your enemies?
- Turning the other cheek?
- Walking an extra mile? (that is if you are walking a mile in the first place!)"
- Receiving by giving?

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 smallness of the seed to the greatness of the results produced. 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

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said the mustard seed produced a plant, actually a tree that became greater than all herbs or garden plants. In Luke 13:19 on page 1622 of your Pew Bible, 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."*

To explain it further Jesus put it this way: Please turn to Matthew 13:31-33 on page 1522: *"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 another example in Matthew 17:20; just turn a few pages to 1529 of the Pew Bible. He (Jesus) replied, *"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 'instant society' we have canned, bottled, and packaged food; we have so many ready to eat things that we can just toss in the microwave, 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 for its:

- Corrective power in disease
- potency against venom
- Its fiery vigor – it was spicy - it was the one spice that poor people used as a condiment
- For such a small beginning, there comes a greater potential than what is expected.

One man and His disciples have become "greater than all garden plants or herbs." Jesus plus 12 plus 70 plus 500 plus 3,000 at Pentecost – you do the math –that is pretty impressive. From simple beginnings we see the gospel spread all over the world. God used the original 12 men to start global evangelism. And you know what - He can use us too if we are willing to become His seed.

How often do we think of ourselves as being too small or too insignificant to make a difference? At first it may seem that we have no effect, but if we diligently 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.

Let me ask you – I want to take a poll – tis the season for polls: which of these would you take in a thirty day period?

- The magnificent and marvelous Billy Graham preaching and 3,000 people giving their lives to Christ each night?
- Or one Christian introducing one soul to Jesus the first day and then those two introducing Jesus to two more and then those four bringing Jesus to four more and so on for thirty days?

Well, at the end of 30 days, Billy Graham would have seen 1,095,000 persons come to Christ. That is VERY impressive! The one-to-one method, which started small like the mustard seed

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would end with, (are you ready?) - 376,870,952! It brings to mind that old TV commercial: 'they'll tell two friends, and so on and so on...'

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. You see, one of the first things to stir in us when we come to Christ should be the desire to see others come to Christ as well. I don't have to preach about harvest in this community. Y'all know what it means to plant, to grow, and to reap. Every member is its own mustard seed. All each believer has to do is to sow and then pray for the harvest. This is the one true mission of the church – the Great Commission – Matthew 28:19-20 *“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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* We are not doing it alone!

There was this new church that was being built. One of the finest features of this new church was going to be a magnificent stained glass window. The Building Committee searched for a subject for the window and finally decided upon the lines from the old hymn: “Around the throne of God in heaven, thousands of children stand.” They hired a very well-known artist and commissioned him to paint the picture from which the stained glass window would be made. As he began the painting, he became so obsessed with the work that he fell in love with the work he was painting. He finally finished it and he went to bed early because tomorrow was going to be the day his painting would be unveiled. During the night, he heard a noise coming from his studio. He got up to go and investigate. When he got to his studio, there was a stranger with a brush in one hand and the color palette in the other working at his painting. “Stop!” the artist cried “you are ruining my painting”. The stranger said, “I think you have already ruined it!” “What do you mean?” asked the artist. “Well”, the stranger said, “you have many colors on your palette but you have only used one color for the faces of the children. Who told you that in heaven there were only children whose faces were white?” “No one”, said the artist, “I just pictured it that way.” The stranger continued in a loving tone of voice, “Look, I am painting their faces in every color and shade of every race. They are all there, for they have all answered my call.” “Your Call?” questioned the artist. “Yes, once long ago I said, *“Let the children come to me and don't stop them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven”* and I'm still saying it today.” The artist finally realized that it was Jesus Himself, and as he did so, the Lord vanished from his sight. The painting looked so much more wonderful now with its children with faces of every shade and color as well as white.

The artist woke up the next morning and rushed into his studio only to see that the painting was just as he had left it the night before. He quickly rushed to paint the faces of the children in the colors of every race throughout the world. The committee arrived and as the painting was unveiled, one of the members of the committee exclaimed, “Look! It's God's family at home!” The Church that began as Jesus and 12 disciples, from very small beginnings, has room in it for everyone who want to know Jesus and have a relationship with Him, but most of all who are willing to be transformed by Him – and His love. We need to be honoring the small beginnings

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of the mustard seed that grows to a big strong tree, whose faith can do marvelous things through the small beginning of a personal relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and to have the faith to let Him grow that relationship – for His grace is sufficient.

Let me share this with you: yesterday in our Confirmation Class, there were questions about the beginning of this church. I shared some of the history and I got to thinking about the sermon I was preparing to give this morning. On that Pentecost Sunday when Y'all walked and came to rent this church from St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church – it began as a mustard seed. One that had been starting to grow – and then it took root, and started to branch out. It is growing into a strong tree. Thank you, Lord Jesus for showing us the way; for delivering us from the wilderness to the tabernacle. Lord, use us as You will – guide us as You will – but let this tree grow and continue to bear fruit.