

## LIVING LARGER PART II: MARK 4:26-32

*Sermon in a Sentence: Mustard Seeds (whether the Kingdom of God or faith) grow in good soil, and this is where I can partner with God in keeping my soil fertile by selecting what I allow into my heart and mind, by exercising my faith through generosity and good works, and by intentional rest.*

### INTRODUCTION

“Living Larger”. I have made a commitment in 2021 to live larger in the power of the Holy Spirit. Living Larger is a mindset of gratitude and abundance. Living Larger starts with growing faith within your soul. Last week we talked about faith the size of a mustard seed. We found this in a story of one of Jesus’ miracles. In front of an ambivalent crowd which included some openly scornful scribes, His humiliated disciples, and one Dad with the faith enough to bring his son to Jesus and wait for Him, Jesus healed a demon-possessed boy. We talked about how the boy’s Dad stayed for Jesus even when His disciples failed to give him what he so desperately wanted, and how he approached Jesus in worship.

After the crowd left, Jesus’ disciples asked why they couldn’t heal the boy. Jesus told His disciples that their faith was small. We talked about faith-receptors and whether or not they are working at optimum capacity. Unfortunately, we can limit God’s power in us through our lack of faith in Him. If faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, then I need to ask myself, “What place does the Word of God have in my life? How am I increasing the effectiveness of my faith-receptors, and how am I giving the Word of God more space in my life so that my faith may deepen?”

Jesus told His disciples that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed they could say to a mountain, “Move!” and it would move for them. Now a mountain is anything in your life that seems like it’s unconquerable and immovable. This was almost a figure of speech back in Jesus’ day and everyone knew that the mountain meant an impossible situation. So Jesus was challenging His disciples by saying that if they had faith that amounted to the size of a mustard seed, you could command the impossible situations in your life to do this or that and they would.

But as I prepared last week’s message, I realized I had more to say about mustard seeds. Jesus has more to say about mustard seeds. In Mark 4:32-36, Jesus likens the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed, but I believe that we can apply the same thing to faith the size of a mustard seed as well.

#### A. **SIZE DOESN’T MATTER, QUALITY DOES:** SEED AND SOIL

Now I know that this contrasts with Jesus rebuking the disciples for smallness of faith. He said if you had faith the size of a mustard seed. Do you know how big mustard seeds are? A mustard seed is pretty small, usually between 1.5-2mm, it's barely perceivable. Do you think perhaps Jesus was telling His disciples that they had no faith? Or, let's say that the disciples did have faith... but it was faith they were not willing to activate. When you don't put it to work it is of no value to you: it has no saving quality.

## **B. FAITH BEGINS AS A RESPONSE**

1. We receive faith as a gift, and we then place our faith in Someone or something. Whether we feel like we've had it all our life, or we can point to one specific moment in time, the faith seed doesn't come from us. The fact that it comes from God should fill us with gratitude that we have such a gift, and not only should we be grateful, but that gratitude should lead us to opening the soil of our hearts to the seed, as well as opportunities to grow.
2. **[Be the Garden]** Being the Garden for seeds of faith is a choice. Now, if your parents brought you to church and made sure you knew Jesus Christ as your Savior, and taught the Scriptures to you, you likely soaked it up like a sponge. That is why it's so important for Christian parents to have their children in places where they will be taught the Scriptures, as well as how to worship, pray, and serve. But as we get older, that's when the volunteerism needs to kick in. Our garden isn't infinite in its size and scope; it's limited to our humanity. If we begin to crowd good seed with bad - or just "not as good" seed - then in the best case scenario the good seed has less room to grow. That's the best case. Many times the good seed - because it is seen as too wholesome and too much work - is often somehow crowded out or choked to death.

## **C. FAITH GROWS WITH CARE. SEEDS TAKE ROOT AND GROW IN GOOD SOIL.**

1. When Jesus told parables, He found illustrations from common life. His parables were short because virtually everyone could instantly relate to His object lessons. The mustard seed illustration was no exception!

City dwellers were in the minority in Jesus' day, and even many of them tended small gardens. Everyone could instantly picture what Jesus meant when He said

that you had to have faith the size of a mustard seed or that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. Even though technology has exploded over the last 100 years, and even though new things are constantly being discovered, the basic facts of farming have been known for thousands of years: seeds don't grow in hardened, rocky, or thistle-infested ground; sometimes the soil needs enriched by fertilizer and always there must be a reliable source of water.

## 2. [Be a Gardener]

- a. Work the soil: ploughing/furrowing, fertilization, and irrigation. It takes living on purpose with great intentionality to work your soil. It also takes a positive, faith-filled outlook. Who knows that we can talk ourselves down from almost anything? When someone presents me with an idea, I am great at identifying why it won't work, or why it won't work for me in particular. Instead, I am seeking to change the way I think and talk and even pray, to make the first response a positive and then figure out how to make it happen.
- b. Select good seed: What other seeds are you planting? We need to be receiving the Word of God, and receiving it often. If all you are getting is on Sunday morning, you're not getting enough. I want to challenge you to do something that gets you in the Scriptures every day. Do it now, before Lent begins. Because when Lent begins, if you're not in a small group, you need to be in one. We need our brothers and sisters in the faith to support us, and to give us some accountability to be all that we can be for the glory of God. True, our ability to meet in person is still quite limited... but all of us have enough technology to stay dialed in. This is how you keep your soil rich for the seed of faith.
- c. Mustard seed plants were annual. Gardening is a continual process: there is saving faith which only needs to be received and applied once, but faith must continue to grow, and just as plants grow and are harvested, and replanted, so our faith, coming from small seeds, must constantly be planted and tended regularly, not just once in our lives.
- d. Tend the plant through doing good. Doing? Wait, I thought that faith was all about believing? And, as Christians aren't we saved by grace through faith, not of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9)? Yes. But let's say that I tell you I believe that everyone needs to be treated kindly, but then I stoically and indifferently greeted everyone in the back after worship today. No smile, eye contact, no elbow bump, just a cold "bye."

Or worse, I angrily berated everyone as they left. My actions would conflict with what I claim to believe. Listen to these words from James...

- i. 'What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

...Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.'

James 2:14-17,21-26

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/JAS.2.14-17,21-26>

Merely claiming you believe is like declaring your good wishes that every homeless person be fed and clothed, but then doing absolutely nothing when you encounter a member of your church family who is in need. Will their needs be met through your good intentions, or through your deeds? Listen now to the Lord Jesus admonish a church who claimed to love the Lord and was very active in doing good things:

- ii. 'But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. '

Revelation 2:4-5

<https://my.bible.com/bible/59/REV.2.4-5>

- iii. In our small group, we are in the middle of a short yet very interesting study called “A Contrarian’s Guide to Knowing God.” This week or lesson and discussion centered around what faith was. We had this working definition of faith: *trusting God enough to do what He says even in adversity, regardless of the outcome.* During the lesson, these verses from Revelation were brought out. Our relationship with God rests on faith and love, but it is defined and strengthened by works, and not just any works.

Have you ever noticed that sometimes churches get busy being busy? That was the problem with this church in Revelation. And as they got busy being busy, that’s when they lost the fire of their relationship with Jesus Christ and that’s why Jesus says, “do the works you did at first.” You know, when you were on fire for Me, when you couldn’t wait to tell your best friends and your family about Me, when you knew I was *the Answer*, when you were ready to risk it all for Me.

One of my favorite hymns has a line in it that sings, “In work that keeps faith sweet and strong...” not busyness, but works that you did *at first.*

- e. Just as good works is critical for your faith, so is rest. God modeled rest in the week of creation. He commanded people to rest - on the seventh day. As Christians our “Sabbath” is the first day of the week - the first day of creation, and the day of Christ’s resurrection and first appearances to His followers. This is why Chick Fil-A is closed on Sunday. I’m not saying every Christian restaurant and business owner should close down on Sunday; he or she should do as they sense leading from the Holy Spirit. But we tend to be driven by money and productivity - and busyness. God forbid we should not be busy!

The Sabbath rest was an intentional, purposeful rest. I believe God’s design is for it to remain an intentional, purposeful rest today. That means we intentionally set aside a portion of the day for worship, and a portion of the day for meaningful rest. Turn off or put down the phone. Don’t watch the news, for heaven’s sake, don’t watch the news! Spend some intentional family time, and plan it a little bit so that you’re not rushed. And maybe you need more rest than just one Sunday afternoon... get away for a spiritual

retreat. You don't have to be a church worker to do that, you know. Disengage from the noise of the world and seek solitude with God. Jesus didn't say, "Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I'll make you busier than you ever dreamed!" He said, "Come to Me, and I will give you... rest."

We see this commanded for the ground, too, in Old Testament Israel. Every seventh year the ground was supposed to rest. Scholars point out that there's no evidence that this was actually followed, and that this may be why God allowed them to go into captivity for 70 years during which their fields were left to nature. The principle of a sabbath for the soil is carried on today, though, in the practice of crop rotation. Allow the ground to rest: the most fertile soil is soil that is allowed to rest after a period of work.

#### **D. Through soil care, we build a Framework of Faith.**

1. For God. Without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6)
2. For others. **[Be a Builder.]** I want to encourage you to be a builder, by taking care of the soil of your soul. Jesus said in Mark 4, that when the mustard plant grew in size, it became large enough for birds to nest in. Our framework of faith can provide a spiritual home for others who desperately need its shelter and centering.
3. For ourselves.

I need a framework of faith for trouble. Without a framework of faith built on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, I would crumble. I need a framework of faith to assure me that God can take adversity I face and use it for good. I need a framework of faith so I can look for opportunities to grow and serve in the midst of hard times. I need a framework of faith to remind me that God is with me even when I don't understand, and that I can look for Him, and when I can't see Him, I trust Him anyway.

I need a framework of faith in easy times, too. This framework of faith admonishes me to stay humble in success and gracious in victory. I need a framework of faith to motivate me to serve and give out of God's abundance. I need a framework of faith to remind me that God brings the easy times, too, and I should not take them for granted but in all things give thanks.

This brings me around full circle - not a vicious cycle but a victorious cycle - because it is soil made rich by an awareness of the presence of God that brings

forth praise and prayer in the midst of trial. And this builds the framework of our faith even stronger.

Praise precedes deliverance!

Genuine Faith - even in the smallest amount - moves mountains!

It is only with a framework of faith that I can sing from the depths of my soul, "It Is WELL!" and not only is that comfort but it is my declaration that moves me forward, that inspires me to be living larger in the power of the Holy Spirit.