

Sermon for Proper 6B
Sunday, June 17, 2018
“Mustard seed effort, shrub-like effect”

Text: Mark 4:26-34; 2 Corinthians 5:6-17

I speak to you in the name of the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sometimes I struggle to find something profound to say to you about the lessons we have just heard, and today seemed to be one of those days. But as I pondered over the readings from Scripture, somehow what came to mind were my grandmother's recipes. My grandmother, like I suspect most people's grandmothers, was a great cook. It seemed like Lulu could make *anything*—just ask her to cook it and she would whip up something. Whether it was something familiar or whether she tried something new, it almost always seemed to come out delicious, and growing up, I would watch her in the kitchen, because I wanted to learn how to cook. And sometimes she would let me cook things, and I didn't just cook things—oh no! I had to cook *fancy* things: eggs benedict, duck à l'orange, vichyssoise—things with fancy French names, and such. Once I grew up and got out on my own, I was faced with the challenge of having to cook for myself; although cooking was a matter of survival, I took on the challenge eagerly, because I love to cook. I remember the summer between junior and senior year in college when I didn't go home, but one of my roommates and I sublet an apartment near campus and we tried to make a go of living completely on our own, even working during the summer to pay our expenses. During that summer I got to cook. I got to cook lots of things. Every day. And although I relished the idea of cooking all those fancy things that I used to cook when I was back home, what I really missed was the stuff my grandmother made. So, I tried to make them. First I would call her and she would give me the list of ingredients off the top of her head with some basic instructions on what to do, and she would end the recipe with, “You know how it tastes.” I'd go to the grocery store, buy a bunch of ingredients—all kinds of spices, all kinds of fancy meats, fancy herbs with fancy names and such—and I would try to make the things my grandmother made. And they tasted awful! My first attempt at gravy was a disaster and my attempt at her gumbo looked more like an experiment from the chemistry lab. Then one day I was really craving her oxtails and gravy. I boiled the oxtails, by then had figured out a technique of making gravy that was the right consistency. And I thought, “What made Lulu's oxtails taste so good?” And I

remembered that all she really ever used to season her food was seasoned salt. Just Lowry's Seasoned Salt. No fancy spices with fancy names, just seasoned salt. And you know what? It tasted exactly like Lulu's oxtails and gravy. I even got the rice right. All because I kept it simple. It was the simple effort that resulted in the greatest benefit.

I think that's what Jesus was trying to get at in today's Gospel reading: a simple effort can have huge results and that we often can simply give it over to God and he will handle it. Today's short passage from the Gospel according to Mark contains two parables. In the first, the farmer scattered seeds on the ground and as the farmer went about his daily life, the seeds sprouted and grew, seemingly with little effort on his part; he simply scattered the seeds. In the second parable, Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed, a tiny black seed that can grow into a huge bushy shrub, so massive that it can provide shade for the birds, but also provides for us a condiment to make our food tasty and a vegetable rich in vitamins and fiber.

Often in life, the simplest things can have the most profound effects. Has someone ever done something for you that was a simple act, but meant the world to you, or was just what you needed in your life. Has someone ever said something to you that sparked an idea or was just what you needed to hear that day? Has someone ever said something to you that changed your life? You see, often the simplest things that we can do for a person or say to a person may make the most profound effects on that person's life, much like the mustard seed that grows into a huge shrub. Perhaps an idea that you have could turn into a business or community project that will help people you don't even know, much like the seed that was scattered and grew without even tending to it. It's great when we can see the results of our efforts, but sometimes we don't. I'll never forget that high school English teacher who asked me a simple question, "Why haven't you applied to Harvard?" That question changed my life in ways that she will probably never know. If only the Wright brothers could see how their flight experiment lasting 59 seconds back in 1903 led to the development of airplanes that help millions of people travel daily, rockets that put men on the moon, and space craft that have probed the farthest reaches of our solar system and help us see the beginnings of the entire universe! A small mustard seed can become a giant shrub.

We are thinking about the ways that we here at All Saints can engage in ministry and mission here and in the community. Remember the words of Canon Claire Woodley last week that the key is just to start and do something; some programs will succeed and some may have to be rethought. In any case, our efforts can have profound effects.

So let us take heed to the words of St. Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians and “walk by faith, and not by sight.” We should have the faith that God’s going to take care of us in whatever situation we find ourselves in, because seeds scattered will grow and bear fruit, even when we don’t know how it happens. And we should always strive to be the best people of God that we can be, because you never know what impact that may have on someone else or the community. The things that inspire us to say or do may have an effect that is beyond our wildest imaginations. We are the hands, feet, and mouths of God in the world, and through us the Kingdom of God that Jesus talked about in his parables, can be realized and manifested in the world today. Amen.

Resource

Feasting on the Word for Proper 6, (Year B, Volume 3)

“Wright Brothers Facts” <http://www.american-historama.org/1881-1913-maturation-era/wright-brothers-facts.htm>