

## “The Little Church with a Big Heart”

Matthew 13:3-15, 31-32

August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Rev. Dr. Jeong Park

Fair Oaks United Methodist Church

Our church and Little Methodist School are planning to participate in the Fair Oaks Chicken festival next month, on Saturday September 16. This will be one of our new commitments to reach out to our community and listen to our neighbor’s voices and their spiritual needs. We’ll prepare free gift grocery bags for everyone who comes by our table. I am working with Betty Philips, our lay leader and Dedra to work out details. I want to show you a tentative design.



Each bag will be printed with this phrase, “The Little Church with a Big Heart!” We are not a big congregation but it doesn’t mean that our heart is small! This morning, I invite you to take a pause and dwell on what it means to have a big heart for our community.

This bag’s short phrase relates to the parable of the seed. Jesus explains the contrast of ‘beginning and end’. When a farmer plants a tiny seed in the ground, Jesus explains to us the consequence of the story. The smallest seed of all seeds becomes the largest of garden trees in the end! What does this point out to us?

If you have ever gardened, you’ll understand Jesus’ point. Jesus used farming as a metaphor for God’s Kingdom. I just want you to know that Jesus’ primary message and ultimate concern was all about **The Kingdom of God**. But don’t misunderstand me. To Jesus, the Kingdom of God is not a concept of ‘territory’, but it is more like an “active progress” where God is working and “a place” where “God reigns’ wherever we are in our lives. Simply speaking, *Jesus devoted himself to the Kingdom of God and invited his disciples to spread the love of God and hope to everyone!* Jesus is also calling each of us and our Fair Oaks United Methodist Church to join him and share the love of God to our neighbors, too.

There are a couple of important spiritual objects in today’s Scripture reading: the first, a small seed, second, the farmer’s persistent attitude and the last, transformative consequence from a small and tiny seed into a big tree. Let’s

begin to explore the first object, a small seed! Jesus took an example of seed. Why did he use this image? Seeds are generally small, and often buried or overlooked, but the little seeds grow day by day, year by year, as Jesus says, it will become great. The tiny little seed grows into the greatest of all shrubs with its large branches and birds can nest in its shade. The seed symbolizes God's dream and vision in us. Whoever you are, you specially chosen and planted in the ground of God's love and grow in Jesus Christ until you become a big tree. Jesus challenges us to dream God's dream! He challenges us not only to dare to dream God's dream but also to sprout and grow!

The church is called to be a farmer for our community! Through our outreach efforts and new creative ministries, we keep planting and spreading the love of God and hope to our neighbors and people who need God's grace and love! What dreams are you dreaming and what kinds of the seeds are we going to plant for our community? One of the church members shared an idea that we collect children's clothes from congregation and give them away to our community without charge. Like free cold water idea on a hot day, we can put them out on a table in the front parking lot and have our neighbors feel free come and take whatever meets their needs. I was inspired by another great idea for young college students in our neighborhood. What if we open to students in our neighborhood and allow them to use one of the facilities like Potter building, for example, Saturdays for their study once per week or month, especially during their mid-term or final-term period. We can share this opportunity through our Facebook page, Instagram or any other SNS resources.

Second is the farmer's tenacious and persistent attitude. Let's recap our Scripture story from verse 3-8: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. He scattered the seeds several different places along the path, on rocky ground, and among thorns. Unfortunately, the first seed didn't survive because it was trampled, the second seed couldn't survive either because of birds, the third seed still struggled because of no moisture due to rocks. Finally, the seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop." Imagine you were a farmer and ready to scatter seeds of onion greens or tomatoes to the ground, you wouldn't expect failures, but in reality it happens. If the seeds don't sprout due to the soil condition, it is a big economic loss to you. An important point in the parable is that a farmer never gives up. The farmer will keep doing it until the seed sprouts and grows to a full harvest! God has the same hope for us!

Lastly, Jesus encouraged all of us, especially our church with saying that "you are not the smallest, but you are special. Look at the smallest seed. Don't look at your present, but see the future that God will do in you. In a sense, a small and tiny seed can be a portrait of our weakness, limitations and vulnerable

present reality. But God can transform our present challenges into abundant blessings in the future! As the farmer dares to plant seeds with great hope for a full harvest, God will see great things that we have in us and use us to make a difference and our church as well! When a mustard seed has grown, it is the greatest shrub and becomes a tree. In near future, many birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” This is a word of hope, empowering us and giving us a visionary thought for our community. Regarding a mustard seed in verse 31, I want to share the meaning of the mustard seed in agricultural context in Jesus’ time. The mustard is well known as a wild plant which is incredibly hard to control, once it takes root it can take over a whole planting area. A theologian, John Dominic Crossan explains the meaning of the wild mustard, “The mustard plant starts as a proverbially small seed and grows into a shrub of three or four feet, or even higher, it is that it tends to take over where it is not wanted, gets out of control, and attracts birds within cultivated areas where they are not particularly desired. And that, said Jesus, was what the Kingdom was like: not like the mighty cedar of Lebanon and not quite like a common weed, [more] like a pungent shrub with dangerous takeover properties.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus urged our church and each of us to be a ‘dangerous and radical hope’ for our community making our faith and church attractive to our community. Jesus ordered us to become hope like the wild mustard plant. Jesus teaches us to be a good seed of hope, a new possibility and be a part of God’s reign that is powerfully growing not only for surviving but also transforming our lives and our community. Jesus Christ calls our Fair Oaks United Methodist Church to be the seed for our community of hope for those who need our care and support.

What dream does our Fair Oaks church have for our community? We are all God’s small seeds influencing our community through our ministries. I hope our Fair Oaks church continues to grow in Jesus Christ doing good works for our community. This is what Jesus expects us to do and to be part of God’s Kingdom. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Historical Jesus*, pp. 278-279