

**“Called to Be Faithful Not Successful”**

Mark 4:26-28

September 25, 2016

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We are going to continue to explore Jesus’ teachings of the Kingdom of God through the parables. Today’s Scripture reading is a story of a small and tiny seed. It is often identified as the mustard seed story in other Gospels. Why did Jesus compare the Kingdom of God to the smallest seed on earth? What is his point? How do we apply to the reality in our lives? A short answer to this parable is this: “the least can be the source of greatness” I challenge all of us to be able to find a new spiritual perspective and a relevant meaning for our lives. How is God involved in your personal life? Think about this point for your spiritual challenge. Our Scripture parable reminds us of a very simple truth about God. God’s standard is not determined by power, size or position. God is at work even in a little tiny seed. People often overlook it, but God cares for you no matter where you are in your life. **God is even working in a little seed!**

Last May, I and my family drove to Redwood National and State Park in Eureka and McKinleyville during our vacation. We really enjoyed beautiful nature and redwood groves, especially marveled at their giant sizes. Someone told me that the tallest redwood tree is in the Redwood State Park. Unfortunately, we were not able to see the tree, but I saw it on the internet. It says that the tallest trees in the world are redwoods and those easily can reach heights of 300 feet (91 meters). Can you picture the contrast between a small seed or a foot size little tree and a 300 feet tall, majestic giant? A little seed looks too weak and powerless, but the truth is, no matter how small it is, once it is planted, and nurtured in the right environment, it will grow into a huge sequoia tree with big sweeping branches. In our Scripture story, Jesus’ main interest and emphasis is not a giant tree as a consequence, but a small and tiny seed as a beginning. We may not pay much attention to a little seed, because it is not clear whether a tiny seed or tree can survive through the days to come, but God’s point of view is totally different from us. Jesus envisions life, promise, and hope for the thriving future in such a small seed. God sees us not by our appearance, present status, or consequences, but He equally sees all of us as different seeds with great potentials.

We often forget *this* perspective. We still believe that size, influence, and position are important factors in determining the outcomes, but appearance is not important to God. God looks for genuine heart even though it is not fully developed. God will recognize the potential and nurture it like the little mustard

seed. Seeds are small, and often buried or overlooked, but we must remember what power lies within them! The little mustard seed might seem small, so tiny that it is easily forgotten by people, but it matters to God. The little seeds grow day by day, year by year, as Jesus says, it will become great. God can see it, imagine it, and most of all, intends it. The tiny little seed grows into the greatest of all shrubs with its large branches and birds can nest in its shade. Our God is at work always. God works for even a little tiny seed which is hidden and not detected by us.

Today, I am very thankful and grateful to all our teachers. Especially I express my special gratitude to our Little Methodist School director and all teachers for their extraordinary effort and tireless work and doing your ministry for children. Our church planted a small and tiny seed, our preschool, 51 years ago and our school has been continuing to grow and grow by your prayers and support. As a parent and pastor, I acknowledge all of our teachers' dedication and commitment for our children. Truly children are the seeds of God's Kingdom and teachers are the committed agents to nurture them and help them grow in the right environment. I also thank our whole congregation for your willingness and support for our preschool ministry. God gave us this special mission. God never stopped his great work and all of you have been faithful.

I want to assure all of us, including our teachers that our ultimate goal is not to pursue success, but to desire to be faithful to God. Every day I drop off my first son Jacob at his school, I see a sign, "Journey to Success, welcome back, parents." And every time I see that sign, I tried to reflect upon its meaning. Henri J.M. Nouwen, a spiritual master, in his book, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*:

When we start being too impressed by the results of our work, we slowly come to the erroneous conviction that life is one large scoreboard where someone is listing the points to measure our worth. And before we are fully aware of it, we have sold our soul to the many grade-givers. That means we are not only in the world, but also of the world. In short, we are worthwhile because we have successes. And the more we allow our accomplishments — the results of our actions — to become the criteria of our self-esteem, the more we are going to walk on our mental and spiritual toes, never sure if we will be able to live up to the expectations which we created by our last successes. In many people's lives, there is a nearly diabolic chain in which their anxieties grow according to their

successes. This dark power has driven many of the greatest artists into self-destruction.<sup>1</sup>

This morning, we commissioned all our Sunday school and Little Methodist School teachers as we begin a fall school term. In our Scripture reading, Jesus is very clear. He tells us, “no matter if you are little, young or old, you are greatly important and you *really* matter to God because you are the seeds for the Kingdom of God.” I also believe Jesus must have added another line, “You are not small and tiny because I am with you. You will continue to grow in me to the right direction of fruitfulness. Truly, our growth, ultimate end and final destination is not to be successful but fruitful. Henri Nowen distinguishes successfulness from fruitfulness in another of his books, *“Bread for Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith”*:

Success comes from strength, control, and respectability. A successful person has the energy to create something, to keep control over its development, and to make it available in large quantities. Success brings many rewards and often fame. Fruits, however, come from weakness and vulnerability. And fruits are unique. A child is the fruit conceived in vulnerability, community is the fruit born through shared brokenness, and intimacy is the fruit that grows through touching one another's wounds. Let's remind one another that what brings us true joy is not successfulness but fruitfulness.”<sup>2</sup>

As the Dalai Lama points out, “The planet does not need more successful people. The planet desperately needs more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of all kinds.” Our God calls each of us, young or old to be His partners and builders to expand God’s reign in our life. The slogan is faithfulness and fruitfulness. I hope that our Sunday school and Little Methodist teachers care for our children and nurture them to be more faithful to God. Not only our teachers but it will be also the same for our individual lives. Our lives may not be great, but instead small, and powerless, but do not get discouraged. God will give power to the powerless. God will lift you up and give you hope with His special heart and eyes. Have faith that God will work in you! As we saw in the Bible, it may begin in smallness, and small hopes, but the path, Jesus says, leads to greatness. A greatness we cannot see or even imagine today. As a tiny little mustard seed grows into fullness. May God lead you and guide you in your path of life. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed on September 23, 2016. <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/869568-when-we-start-being-too-impressed-by-the-results-of>

<sup>2</sup> Accessed on September 23, 2016. <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/5229544-there-is-a-great-difference-between-successfulness-and-fruitfulness-success>