

SERMON SERIES

*Making Our Garden Grow*

SERMON TITLE

“Even the Smallest Seed” (Luke 13:18-19)

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Today, we wrap up our summer Sermon series inspired by the findings and recommendations of our Long-range Planning Ministry Team at Meadowbrook. Each week we’ve been exploring how the Bible speaks into the areas identified by our Long-range team, including the 4 top categories the team believes to impact the future health of our local church. Over the last few weeks, we’ve considered Openness to Change, the importance of Increasing Attendance and Participation, and what our Forecasted Financial Status speaks to us, and last week, Reaching Young Adults.

In this series, we’ve seen how God calls on us to tend to our community as if tending our gardens. For all the gardeners out there, you know how much work it takes to truly tend even the most well-maintained garden. As we’ve seen, our community has changed greatly over time and so have we. We live in a different world than the one we grew up in. Yet for the young, *this* is the world they grow up in. It is our charge as a church of Jesus Christ to be relevant to the community we serve as it is now, and this calls on us to intentionally adapt and make plans to reach out to those in need in effective ways. You might say this is incarnational. Just as Jesus came to be with us in the Incarnation, we are called to be present to our community in all its need today. But in order to be that presence, we need to re-dedicate ourselves to being present on a regular basis, attending and participating in the Worship and ministries of our church. No one else will do the work for us. In Congregationalism, it is up to us to make decisions and do the work of being the church, and each one of us is important in this process.

This morning, we revisit a famous parable that Jesus taught: the mustard seed.

In our passage from Luke, Jesus compares the coming kingdom of God to a mustard seed, but not just the seed itself. Jesus speaks of a seed which has actively been taken and planted. People have taken action; they have done something intentional. And this seed then grows to a lush tree that can even house birds. Essentially, people of faith do the good

work and its benefits are plentiful for many.

A tree that provides shelter for creatures is a common metaphor for a kingdom throughout the Bible. While Jesus does not particularly highlight it, a mustard seed is among the smallest seeds; so small, that it can even be hard to see it. Curiously, the mustard seed would be known by Palestinian villagers to grow into more of a shrub than a tree. So Jesus is saying that something nearly invisible at first, when tended in faith and with care, will grow and bring about flourishing that extends beyond what we expect. We can consider the smallness of the seed, but we can also view this as being about humility. Scholars have long wondered why Jesus didn't use the glorious cedar trees of Lebanon as His example in describing the kingdom of God here. It seems that Jesus' choice of the modest-sized mustard seed and shrub says more about what God prizes; that God's kingdom will be ushered in by humble people of faith making sacrifices for those in need, as opposed to a rich and powerful leader coercing everyone into submission. The kingdom of God is comprised of love, compassion, mercy, and intentional, relevant, yet humble care. It is one in which people take up their crosses on behalf of one another and out of great love for God. God's kingdom is born of even the smallest seed, it grows from each one of our hearts, it grows from you.

It is interesting to consider this famous parable in context of what appears around it in Luke. Note that our passage begins with Jesus saying "therefore." This suggests a continuation of thought and connects this parable with the action taking place around it. Jesus is under attack leading up to this passage. He then highlights how God's kingdom will persevere, seemingly despite and even through such opposition. It suggests that faith will win out even through great challenge.

Notice what Jesus *doesn't* compare the kingdom of God to. He doesn't compare it to high-powered royalty, the elite, or military leaders of the day or even of history. Jesus doesn't talk about the kingdom by way of indicating the role power or powerful people play in bringing it about. Rather, Jesus uses a story anyone could relate to from a small Palestinian village; He talks about a mustard seed. God's kingdom includes and is built on the humble people who do the work.

By planting our faith into the garden of revitalizing our local

church, even the smallest seed of faith will bloom and grow into thriving life. Let's plant our seeds today for the faith of tomorrow. Let's join together and do the work we've been called to. Let's live into the changes that have happened and continue to happen around us, keeping an open heart and an open mind, and let's commit ourselves to doing the work of the church together, as people of faith have done for millennia. Let's educate ourselves about our status and make good decisions together to adapt as needed. Get involved. Make some changes in your life to allow more time for you to share your gifts as the church. Join a ministry team. Attend Worship as much as you possibly can. Remember that Worship is *for* God, not for me and not for you. It is something scripture and tradition and Jesus all call on us to offer to the great God who made us. It is our responsibility to be present, to be involved. Let's intentionally reach out to young adults, families, and our youth, and listen to what they have to say, asking them about their dreams, fears, challenges, and hopes for the future. What questions do they have? How can we be present to them and remind them of the eternal truth that God has always loved them and cares for them, no matter who they are?

Friends, it begins with God, of course. There is no doubt that God has blessed and made us for the task of being the church. Jesus has shown us how. We see it in the scriptures. We know the kinds of things He did, and what price He paid to welcome all God's people even to death on the cross. But while it begins with God, it certainly continues with us, with you. Only you can decide to be the church we're called to be. So may we pray together to our great God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, that our hearts and minds be as one, not in lock-step uniformity, but in loving understanding and solidarity with all God's people. May we make our garden grow together today, tomorrow, and all our tomorrows, welcoming all people, out of love for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by the tender guidance of the Holy Spirit of life, to the glory of God.

Let's do it. May it be so. AMEN.