When Little is Much

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He also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, [27]and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. [28]The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. [29]But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.' [30] He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? [31]It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; [32]yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.' [33] With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; [34]he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples. (Mark 4:26-34)

1. Vegetables Grow

This photo was taken from the garden in the parsonage last week. As you see, the wild sesames are very small. But in a few months, we know that they will be big. Here is a picture that I took from the same garden last year. The small sprouts will grow little by little and will be big soon.

How do vegetables grow? All plants start life as a seed. Seeds are usually small. Some like the mustard seed are tiny. Despite their small size, seeds contain food and all the instructions necessary to sprout to life as a plant. When seeds are planted on the ground, they first grow roots. Once these roots take hold, a small plant will begin to emerge and eventually break through the soil. When this happens, the seed has sprout. Scientifically this process is called germination. As the plant grows and begins to make its own food from nutrients it takes from the soil, it will grow into a larger plant. There are three things needed to grow. They are light, food and water.

Scientists still don't fully understand what happens inside of a seed as it comes to life. The growing of seed is still a bit of a mystery. Since we believe that God is the creator of everything in the world, we would say that God leads vegetables and trees to grow. We praise the Lord and give thanks to God for helping their growth. But quite often we take their growth for granted or forget what God does behind the scenes.

2. The Parable of the Growing Seed

In today's scripture, Jesus talks about two parables. The first one is the parable of the growing seed, and the second one, the parable of the mustard seed. The point of the two parables is the growth of seed. Jesus compares the

kingdom of God with the growth of seed. The parable of the growing seed is found only in Mark's gospel. In this parable, Jesus emphasizes that although people scatter seed, they do not know how the seed grows. Its growth happens not by human action but by the power of the creator God.

3. The Parable of the Mustard Seed

In Mark 4:30-32, Jesus tells his disciples the parable of the mustard seed. The focus of this parable is its small beginnings and large growth, and the result of the growth. By using this parable, Jesus emphasizes the universal reach of God's kingdom that attracts nesting birds. At the end of the parable, Jesus says, "***When it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts* forth *large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade****."* When the mustard seed grows, the birds make nests in its shade. The benefit of the growth of mustard seed goes to the birds of the air.

What do the birds symbolize here? In the Old Testament, birds are used to illustrate what would happen to Gentiles. Gentiles, like birds, would take shelter in the shade of the branches of the tree. Ezekiel 17:23 says, "***On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind***." Here we learn that the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's kingdom is the goal of the growth of God's kingdom.

After Jesus ascended, Jesus' disciples were not concerned about how to stick together or necessarily maintain their intimate friendship. They were interested in scattering seed of the gospel. The disciples left Jerusalem and went to Judea, Samaria and wherever the Gentiles lived to bear witness that Jesus had risen from the dead and that he was the Savior.

Peter visited Cornelius, the first Gentile convert and baptized him and his family. Barnabas and Saul went to missionary journeys. They lived such a radical life not because they wanted to but because the Holy Spirit made them do so. The disciples became seeds of faith to many Gentiles. They were not concerned about the growth of God's kingdom at all. That is God's job and the growth would happen based on God. These disciples were simply willing to lay down everything for God's kingdom. The result of their dedication is the spreading of the gospel to all areas of the world including our community here. Do you think God's kingdom is still growing? The answer is "yes."

4. Churches in China

Last week, I learned that by 2030, China will have the largest Christians in the world. Since 1978, when churches began reopening after Chairman Mao died, Christian congregations have skyrocketed in China. In 1949, China's Protestant community had one million members. In 2010, there were more than 58 million Protestants in China. Fenggant Yang, a professor of sociology

at Purdue University and author of *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*, believes that the number of Christians will be roughly 160 million by 2025. That would put China ahead of the United States, which had around 159 million Protestants in 2010 but whose congregations are in decline. Yang predicts that China's total Christian population, including Catholics, would exceed 247 million, placing China above Mexico, Brazil and the United States. In 12 years, China would become not just the world's number one economy but also the largest Christian nation. It is amazing to learn that many people out of 1.3 billion Chinese people seek meaning and spiritual truth that neither communism nor capitalism have supplied.

One more thing I learned is that in China, there are millions of Protestants who worship at illegal underground "house churches," which hold unsupervised services often in people's homes to evade the prying eyes of the Communist Party. Although the clause in the country's 1982 constitution guarantees citizens the right to engage in "normal religious activities," the Chinese government wants pastors to preach in a Communist way. They do not accept foreign missionaries. Despite such a restriction, the churches in China keep growing. Why do you think the rapid growth of Christianity is possible in China? My missionary friend told me that it is because the Holy Spirit keeps empowering Christians and their dedication is unbelievable. They are full of passion for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

5. 2018 VBS

What do you think we can do for our community? After today's worship service, we will have a Vacation Bible School volunteers' meeting. VBS is one of the most important outreach programs that Swift Memorial Church offers for the children in our community. As I told you before, I went to church for the first time when I was about five years old to attend VBS. My friend invited me to go to church for VBS. I still remember a teacher who taught us with passion about the heroes in the Old Testament. Although the VBS was just for a few days, it made a big impact on my life.

For the past two years, I noticed many people at our church volunteered and helped with the preparation for VBS. I've heard we need over $400 to buy study materials for students and teachers. We look for special extra donations to buy those materials. Your love offerings will be greatly appreciated and your contribution will bring great results much more than we expect or imagine. We must keep in mind that when we bring little the Lord will make it much. When one child is touched, he or she will make a big impact on many people.

We hope some of them to be part of our church family. But it does not matter. Although they may not join our church, they can be used for God's kingdom later. Who knows one of them would come back to our church as a pastor when he or she is grown up. We should see the bigger picture.

6. Leaving a Legacy

Last Friday, I am sure you might have been shocked when you heard of the death of Anthony Bourdain, a gifted chef and storyteller. He was one of those who lived his life following his passion. I do not watch TV often, but I enjoyed his shows on the extraordinary diversity of cultures, cuisine and the human condition. The CNN network's president, Jeff Zucker, said, "Tony will be greatly missed not only for his work but also for the passion with which he did it."

Recently I have been meditating on this question. "What legacy do I want to leave behind?" I do not have any personal property other than my camera and computer. But I would like to be remembered as the one who pursues the passion to share the love that I have found in Jesus Christ. Jesus showed me how to live my life. He did not live his life for himself. He loved God's people with God's genuine love. Jesus lived his life according to God's purpose so that he died on the cross. He says in John 12:24, "***Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit***." Jesus became a grain of wheat and fell into the earth and died. And his genuine love helped God's people to find a true happiness.

7. Conclusion

In the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-9), Jesus says, "***Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold***" (verse 8). Imagine you invest $1,000 and will get $10,000 in a few months. Would you like to take the chance? If our investment produces 100 times, it will be $100,000. Are you interested in doing this kind business? In business world, profits are not guaranteed, but in God's business, the profit is always guaranteed. Whatever we do for God's kingdom, we should expect the amazing harvest. And we should keep in mind that such a wonderful crop is given not only for us but also for the benefits and blessings of others.

8. Application

Although the seed we are going to scatter is tiny, it has the potential to become great. So when we see a seed, we have to see the future of the seed, a great harvest. God is working behind the scenes day and night. The question is, "do we trust the Lord and sow seeds of faith on hearts of others? If there is no sowing seed, there would be no crop. If we scatter seed of the gospel today, God's kingdom will be full of fruits in the future.

The gospel of Jesus Christ has a power to make a difference in the lives of God's people in the world. And those who will be blessed through our sacrifice and dedication will be grateful to the Lord and to us. Amen.