

## The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Mark 4:30-32

Sunday, September 15, 2024 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

1 Corinthians 15:58 “Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

The words above are what it says at the end of the great chapter on the Resurrection, but what if you feel like serving Christ and praying and doing good is like “spinning your wheels”? What do you do then? All of us feel like this at one time or another. We can relate to the struggle of this kindergarden teacher trying to help one of her students. He asked for help with his boots and she could see why. With her pulling and him pushing, the boots still didn’t want to go on. By the time she got the second boot on, she had worked up a sweat. She almost whimpered when the little boy said, “Teacher, they’re on the wrong feet.” She looked and sure enough, they were. It wasn’t any easier pulling the boots off than it was putting them on. She managed to keep her cool as they worked together to get the boots back on-this time on the right feet. He then announced, “These aren’t my boots.” She bit her tongue rather than get right in his face and scream, “why didn’t you say so?” like she wanted to. Once again she struggled to help him pull the ill-fitting boots off. He then said, “They’re my brother’s boots. My Mom made me wear them.” She didn’t know if she should laugh or cry. She mustered up the grVace to wrestle the boots on his feet again. She said, “Now, where are your mittens?” He said, “I stuffed them in the toes of my boots...”

- We need a “why”

The apostle Paul gives us instruction to persevere, but sometimes we need a why. We all have days, like that teacher’s in which church, and doing good, and seeking to obey the Lord seems frustrating and without purpose. We need a “why”. In fact, having no “why” to life can be dangerous.

- The danger of no “why”

I read recently, in the British newspaper “The Independent”, about a brilliant schoolboy who shot himself in the head after carefully calculating the benefits of life and deciding it was not worth living, an inquest was told yesterday. Dario Iacoponi, 15, a pupil at the London Oratory in Fulham, west London, which is attended by Tony Blair's two sons, Euan, 14, and Nicky, 12, He kept a diary of his philosophical thoughts on life in the two months leading up to his death but unfortunately calculated mathematically the benefits and the drawbacks and came to the conclusion that the math simply does not add up. The drawbacks are more numerous than the benefits and so life simply was not worth it. So he carefully planned and executed his suicide. The Oratory is one of the top Roman Catholic schools in the country. This was a popular, respected, well adjusted young man with an imposing intellect, but he had no “why” to the question of life.

- The Kingdom is like a mustard plant

Jesus spoke with his disciples and told them that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard plant. The seed of the plant is small and seems insignificant, but the plant can grow large, and do so quickly. The kingdom grows, and how it grows and the speed of that growth can be surprising. I think the point is that when it comes to this special kingdom which consists not of geography but of the hearts of men and women there is often, I believe, more going on that what may appear.

The same British newspaper had an article about an organism that I think symbolizes, in a way, the growth of the Kingdom of God. It goes as follows: “The largest living organism ever found has been discovered in an ancient American forest. The *Armillaria ostoyae*, popularly known as the

honey mushroom, started from a single spore too small to see without a microscope. It has been spreading its black shoestring filaments, called rhizomorphs, through the forest for an estimated 2,400 years, killing trees as it grows. It now covers 2,200 acres (880 hectares) of the Malheur National Forest, in eastern Oregon. The outline of the giant fungus stretches 3.5 miles (5.6 kilometres) across, and it extends an average of three feet (one metre) into the ground. It covers an area as big as 1,665 football fields. On the surface, the only evidence of the fungus are clumps of golden mushrooms that pop up in the autumn with the rain.” This, the largest living organism ever found, is huge, but if you were in the woods where it lies, you would never know it was there.

- Nothing stops it.

Richard Wurmbrand, the Romanian Lutheran minister who founded the ministry “Voice of the Martyrs” wrote of how the Kingdom of God spread even under the persecution of East European Communism. Even in the face of prison and torture, in which any public expression of faith-including church- was outlawed, the Kingdom of God spread and outlived Communism.

I propose that the work of the Holy Spirit, extending the Kingdom of God in the hearts of people is always more active than what may appear to the casual observer. Even in Wayne alone, there are sixteen churches, and any number of people who sing to Christ, pray to Christ and seek inspiration to serve Christ in their daily lives. The Kingdom of God is spreading whether we can see it or not, and that is our “why” to the question of life. It is why we can know our labor in the Lord is not in vain.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/oregons-monster-mushroom-is-worlds-biggest-living-thing-710278.html>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/brilliant-pupils-logical-suicide-1188778.html>