

A Sermon for 4th Sunday after Pentecost

June 16, 2024



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Click Here for today's Readings:

[Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

1 Samuel 15:3-16:13, 2 Corinthians 5: 6-17, Mark 4:26-34

From tiny things

Jesus is speaking in parables and gives his followers much courage by noting that tiny things can have big results. The famous metaphor of the mustard seed remains lodged in our minds as a perfect example. The mustard seed is so very small – Jesus calls it the smallest of all seeds on earth, yet when it is sown, it becomes a huge shrub where birds can nest in its branches. From something tiny, greatness will come.

This could also apply to our Old Testament story about the choosing of David to be the next king of Israel. Saul, the first king, had not worked out very well, and Samuel had to find another. God is with him as he approaches the house of Jesse. Jesse parades his handsome sons before Samuel, who is willing to choose any of them, they all look so good. Yet God dissuades him from making a choice based on appearances. God tells Samuel that “the Lord does not see as humans see: they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” After rejecting seven of Jesse’s sons, Samuel asks if he has any more. “Oh, just the little one, the youngest, who is out tending the sheep.” And that’s the one the Lord chooses. David is brought in from the hills and immediately is anointed by Samuel. Our reading says that the spirit of the Lord came mightily on David from that day forward.

So, the unlikely youngest son, who probably came in smelling of sheep and wondering what this was all about, is chosen by God. This echoes an earlier ancestor story, when Joseph, the eleventh son of Jacob, is discarded by his brothers, but ultimately becomes a powerful ruler in Egypt and saves his whole family from starvation. From small things, and small people, great things can come.

We certainly hope so. As a parish, we are small but mighty, and we still expect great things, with God’s help.

This preference to focus on the least, on the smallest, on the youngest, shows up throughout our culture. I just rewatched the movie [The Sound of](#)

Music, and as the Von Trapp children bid us goodnight, they leave the stage singing “So long, farewell” in order of age. The final child, Gretl, is five years old, and we all go “Awe!” She’s our favorite! We are hardwired to love the small, the diminutive, as we nurture our children, the precious small humans we love. We have been prepared for the preference by lots of fairy tales, from rags-to-riches Cinderella and a whole line of princesses promoted by Disney. I remember a doll my sister received for Christmas one year, called Poor Pitiful Pearl. The sweet doll was clothed in rags, and came with another costume, truly rich and beautiful. My sister could work the transformation herself, just by changing the clothes. Working that miracle in the real world is more difficult.

In the 1960s, a new theology emerged from Latin America, called Liberation Theology, stating boldly that God has a preference for the poor. It echoes Jesus’ teaching. We enact it by trying to help the poor – with clothing drives to literally change their clothes; with contributions to the FISH food pantry; with donations for world catastrophes, such as the Episcopal Relief and Development fund. We support our own “small but mighty” parish here, where New Life bubbles through our relationships, our worship, our projects. Your pledges sustain the parish – our budget is based entirely on what you contribute, and we do an astonishing amount of work for the Kingdom of God.

Our secular society has a different message, of course. We are constantly told that BIG IS BETTER. Using Jesus’ metaphor of the mustard seed, our society wants to go straight to the big plant and preen about our success. Yet we know what Jesus really meant: pay attention to the little things. Always remember the poor. Pray regularly for the redemption of our society, that God’s reign shall come on earth, as it is in heaven. Let us look for opportunities to plant seeds that will make the world a better place, that will nurture love and acceptance of everyone. Just one tiny seed can become a mighty bush. May we sow seeds of hope for a better world.