



May 18-19, 2019
Pastor Ellis White

Beyond These Walls: Small Beginnings, Great Endings

Mark 4:30-32

Isn't it amazing to hear stories of how God has been at work in the lives of people? Eric is an incredible young man and I have no doubt he is going to make a big impact for the kingdom of God. How exciting that we get to be a part of his growth and development here at Chapel Hill?

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Ellis White and I'm the Pastor of Weekend Services here at Chapel Hill. Today we are wrapping up our three-week celebration of what God has already been doing through our Beyond These Walls initiative.

As a reminder, two years ago we shared with you that we felt God had called us to move Beyond These Walls like never before in loving our neighbor, making disciples and sending leaders. But to do this, we needed to work together to release finances that were currently being directed towards debt. We would pay off our debt, and then use the money we had previously been directing towards debt to fund these Beyond These Walls initiatives.

Three years ago our debt stood at five million dollars. Today we are under two millions dollars. And with one year to go, the end is in sight. And yet, although the money for these initiatives won't be released until we have paid off the debt, God has already gotten ahead of us and started moving in significant ways.

Two weeks ago you heard Pastor Mark share about loving our neighbors, and our relationship with FISH Food Bank, and our commitment to give a \$100,000 lead matching gift to their new building campaign once our debt is paid off. Last week you heard from Pastors Megan and Larry about making disciples through our new church plant in Port Orchard—launching around Easter of 2020. This week, I want to share with you about our third Beyond These Walls initiative: sending leaders.

Over the last 30 years we have raised up and sent out more than 20 missionaries across the world, and 16 pastors into the church. That's not bad for not even really trying! In fact, if you've been around Chapel Hill a few years, you'll be pleased to know that last weekend Jeremy Vaccaro, our former Executive Associate Pastor, and now Pastor of First Pres Fresno, graduated with his PhD in Organizational Leadership from Eastern University!

We are excited that God has used as a church in this way in the past. And we believe God has called us to do this even more intentionally. Because we believe God uses small beginnings to create great endings.

And we aren't the only ones to believe this to be true. Jesus did too, and he told a story about it, and this weekend I want us to take a look at that story from Mark's gospel. We're in Mark 4:30.

And [Jesus] said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? 31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” Mark 4:30

Jesus as a Mustard Seed

God uses small beginnings to create great endings. Jesus tells us a story about a grain of mustard seed. He’s likely talking about black mustard seed, like this.

Now, just so you know, those are centimeters on that ruler up there, not inches. It’s what the rest of the world uses to measure things. As you can see from the photo, each seed is only 1mm in diameter. That’s about 1/25 of an inch. This is a small beginning.

In fact, Jesus likely tells this story because many people at that time thought his ministry was pretty small and insignificant. Jesus claimed to have ushered in the reign of God’s kingdom on earth, but for the Jews living at that time, their expectation was that when God’s kingdom came to reign on earth, it would come in power and might, in a way that everyone knew, and it would come with judgment and destruction of all the other nations that didn’t follow God. But when Jesus came, he didn’t do any of that. His beginning was small and appeared insignificant. Honestly, it reminds me of an Eddie Murphy movie called Coming to America.

Undercover King

Now, if you haven’t seen this movie, don’t worry about it, it’s really not that great, plus it’s R-rated. But, in this movie, Eddie Murphy plays Prince Akeem who is a prince of a great African kingdom and he needs to find a wife. Of course, he has his choice of wives in Africa—everyone wants him. But he doesn’t want a woman who wants to be with him because of his title; he wants a woman who wants to be with him because of who he is. So, he decides to come to New York City and live undercover as a regular schmuck to find a woman of intelligence and will. Funny premise, right. Lots of room for Eddie Murphy humor.

Well, in the same way, Jesus is the heir of the kingdom of God. The most powerful kingdom in existence. He has great power and might at his command. He could come and overturn all the nations and bring judgement upon the earth. But when he came 2000 years ago, he didn’t. He was humble. A servant. Meek. He demonstrated God’s love for all, especially for those who were far from God. And the religious leaders at the time, and many of the Jews, didn’t believe he was who he claimed to be, because he didn’t act like the king they expected.

Small Beginnings, Great Endings

In this story, Jesus is likening his own ministry to a mustard seed. It is small. It is apparently insignificant. In Jesus’ own words, “The smallest of all seeds on the earth.” (v. 31b) And yet, Jesus says, “when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants.” (v. 32a) Although

Jesus' ministry is small, it will become something huge! Take a look at what Jesus says the small insignificant mustard seed becomes.

A huge plant. Up to 3 feet across by 12 feet tall! Much larger than all the other garden plants that Jews would have planted at that time. And all of that from one seed. One seed. In the same way, Jesus' small beginning is going to result in a great ending. And 2000 years later, we can see that. One man's ministry is now celebrated and followed by more people around the world than anyone else in history.

And note what Jesus says about this plant: "[it] puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." (v. 32b) This plant becomes a place of refuge for the birds. It becomes a place where they can make a nest to lay eggs, to raise their young, to leave them while they go in search of food, to help them grow and nurture, and eventually to push them out of the nest to help them fly. Jesus' kingdom was going to be a place where people could find refuge and safety, not a place of judgment and condemnation. And billions of people through the ages have found that to be the case.

The Holy Club

This idea of small beginnings and great endings doesn't just apply to Jesus ministry. I believe we have seen this repeated throughout the centuries through the lives of men and women who started small, but God used in a powerful way.

In the early 1730s, three young men got together with some students at Oxford University and formed the "Holy Club," meeting in one of their student rooms at Lincoln College. They wanted to pursue greater holiness at "a time of great moral and spiritual darkness... [when] spiritual indifference and skepticism abounded, and liberty degenerated into license." Sounds just like today, right?

On New Year's Day 1739, these three men, plus a number of others were gathered in London, and in their words, "'About three in the morning, as we were continuing in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground (overcome by the power of God). As soon as we recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His majesty, we broke out with one voice, 'We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.'"

This was indeed a small beginning with only a handful of people. But from these three men came the entire Methodist movement, over 6,500 hymns, and the First Great Awakening in which hundreds of thousands of people came to faith in Jesus here in the US. You probably know the names of these three: The Wesley brothers—John and Charles—and their friend George Whitfield.

Albert McMakin

If you are young, you may feel like you have little to offer to God. But God took the lives of these three students—three mustard seeds—and made an impact globally. Here's another story of a mustard seed.

[Transcript of Video:

I heard about a man called Albert McMakin. He was 24 years of age, he was a farmer, he'd just become a Christian and he was really excited. So he heard that there was this event going on where someone was speaking about Jesus, and he decided he would invite all his friends.

And he'd got this old van, and there was one guy he really wanted to come. He was a farmer's son, and he really wasn't interested. This guy had lots of girlfriends, he was a very good-looking guy. And he thought, 'How am I going to get him?' So eventually he said to him, 'Look, would you drive the van?' And the guy said, 'Okay, well, I'll drive the van. I'm not particularly keen to come in, but I'll drive the van.'

And he came along and drove the van, and just was interested in what was going on, so he popped in at the back, and he was spellbound. And he went back night after night after night. And on the last night the speaker said, 'Look, if you want to give your life to Jesus, come to the front.' And this farmer's son got up and went to the front.

Since that day, that person has spoken to 210 million people in person about the Christian faith. He's been the friend and confidant of nine American Presidents. And he's spoken — not live, but through television and so on — to half the world's population. His name, of course, is Billy Graham.]

The Hebridean Revival

And don't believe that you have to be young for God to use you. In 1949 on the island of Lewis and Harris, the largest island of the outer Hebrides, off the northwest coast of Scotland, lived two elderly sisters: Peggy Smith, 84, who was blind, and Christine Smith, 82, who was bent over with arthritis. These two women were unable to attend worship, but prayed for months in their cottage for God to send revival to their village of Barvas.

Two mustard seeds. "The sisters prayed by name for the people in each cottage along the village streets. They loved their church and respected their minister, but longed for a new visitation of God. God gave them the promise, "I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground" (Isa. 44: 3). The Smith sisters prayed this promise day and night."

One morning, Peggy saw a vision of "the churches crowded with people, including many young people, and hundreds being swept into the kingdom. She saw the Lamb in the midst of the throne with the keys of heaven in his hand... Peggy sent word to [the local minister] that God had shown her He was going to send a mighty revival. She asked him to call together the elders and deacons of the church for special times of waiting on God for revival."

Results of the Revival

Over the next 3 years revival swept over that island. The churches were indeed filled with young people. One memorable night included 100 young people, who were at a dance, unexpectedly leaving the dance hall en masse to go to the revival meeting at the church. In fact, it is estimated that more than 75% of those who were converted in the revival on Lewis and Harris, were converted before they ever stepped foot in a church, so strong was the power of God's Spirit. And it all began

with the Smith sisters—82 and 84 years old—praying together for God to send revival. Two mustard seeds.

Do We See Potential?

God uses small beginnings to create great endings. The question, I believe we need to wrestle with, is can we see that potential in our lives and the lives of others? When we look at our life, do we see that potential? When we look at the person sitting in the pew next to us, do we see that potential? Do we believe God can do powerful things through one grain of mustard seed?

My Story

In January 2011, I was sitting in this classroom in Oxford on a cold Friday morning when two gentlemen, unfamiliar to me and the rest of the 19 students at the Oxford Center for Christian Apologetics, walked into the room. There was an empty seat next to me and one of them sat in it. I introduced myself to him, and he, in turn, told me he was a pastor from the Seattle area named Mark. We chatted a little, and the next day, I bumped into him again at a conference we were both attending at my church, St Aldates in Oxford.

And in this church, the place where I had my return to Jesus aged 18, where I first saw my wife from across the room, and where I eventually put a ring on her finger, I was handed by this American pastor named Mark, a business card. In fact, I say I was handed, but he actually unbuttoned my top pocket and shoved it in there, and slapped me on the chest. That day, over 8 years ago, he told me, “When you’re done with your studying, if you want a job, let me know, I would love to have you come and work for me.”

My Potential

Your Pastor, Mark Toone, saw a mustard seed in me. And let me tell you, it was a pretty small and dirty mustard seed. But he saw the potential. And without his vision, I don’t know where I would be today. But with his vision, a few months after our first encounter, we came to visit Chapel Hill, and we fell in love with this place.

From that small beginning, 8 years ago, I’ve been loved by this community, spurred on by this community, equipped by this community, given the chance to make lots of mistakes by this community, and eventually ordained and called as an Associate Pastor by this community. But without that vision of our pastor, none of that would have happened.

Chapel Hill Sees Potential

Can you see that sort of potential? Can you see the potential in one mustard seed? Perhaps you already know the next Charles Wesley, who is going to change the course of church music? Perhaps you already know the next Billy Graham who is going to change the course of millions of lives? Perhaps you already know the next Peggy Smith who is going to pray her heart out for God to send revival and then witness it happening? Perhaps you already know them. But can you see that potential?

We want to be a church that sees potential in people. We want to be a church that is willing to pour resources—time and money—into the lives of people who might otherwise not receive it, because we believe small mustard seeds, given the right conditions and enough time will grow into large plants that provide places of refuge to many people. That’s why sending leaders is a part of our Beyond These Walls vision. Because we realize that even if we can invest to provide the right conditions for mustard seeds, the return for the kingdom of God on our investment will be beyond our wildest dreams.

And we’re doing it right now. We have four young men and women on our staff right now who are being mentored and raised up to become next generation leaders. You’ve already heard from them this morning. Julie Hawkins, our Director of Next Steps. Ryan Palmer, our Director of Family Ministries. Gunnar Tesdahl, our Director of Worship. And, Rachel White, our LifeGroup Coordinator. We believe that God has called us to invest resources in young leaders like these, because the return on that investment for the kingdom of God is going to be massive. And let me tell you, I know these four men and women, and they are kingdom shakers. The potential wrapped up in these little mustard seeds is unreal!

Conclusion

But we believe God has called us to more. We believe God has called us to become a sending church, that raises up leaders for the church across the world. And when we have finished paying off that debt, and we have released those financial resources, we want to invest in sending leaders like never before. Our goal is to establish the next generation of leaders for the church. With small beginnings come great endings.

This weekend, I want to close by asking you to do two things. First, believe that God can use you. Sometimes it’s easier to believe that God can use someone else than it is to believe God can use you. But you are a mustard seed, packed with potential. How might God already be using you? Where might he be calling you to plant yourself to provide a place of refuge to people around you?

Second, pray for revival to come through this next generation of leaders. In your worship guide you will find a piece of paper that is designed to be a prayer guide for you. You’ll see those four faces on it that I just mentioned. We would love you to pray that God would use these four men and women in a mighty way for his kingdom. And on the other side, you’ll find the names of people who we’ve already sent out and we would love you to pray for them too.

One mustard seed is all it takes. Do you see the potential? Jesus does. Let’s pray.