



July 26, 2020

Good morning and welcome to worship at Bethany,

As this is my last Sunday to lead worship at Bethany, I want to start by saying thank you to all of you who are the faith community of this congregation. It has been a very meaningful, deeply gratifying, and wonderfully blessed journey of pastoral leadership that I have shared with you the people of Bethany. Thank you for your support, your prayers, and your service to God as we have shared in doing a joint ministry together.

I am excited for what the future holds for Bethany. I know that the unknown brings with it a certain anxiety. I know that there will be challenges ahead as Bethany seeks to carve out a new vision of ministry going forward. But I also know, that God is with you every step of the way. Whatever decisions are made, whatever directions are pursued, whatever hurdles you encounter ... you will be guided by God's Holy Spirit. Every new beginning starts as a mustard seed ... a small seed full of potential and yearning to grow. This parable that Jesus tells and we hear today, the Parable of the Mustard Seed, is perfect for the time that is now for Bethany. This is a parable filled with potential, new growth, and opportunity. This is Bethany's parable today.

Let the words of this scripture sink into your being both as individual members and as a faith community. I have been blessed to be your pastor. May God bless you all to be the community of faith God is calling you to be.

Keep the Faith,

Pastor Rick

WORSHIP July 26, 2020

(To watch the videotaped version of the worship service, click the link below)

<https://youtu.be/3z08ttYwEb8>

(To read the service with a written sermon from Pastor Rick, continue on from here)

GREETING AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP

Lord, teach us today what it means to be about Kingdom living.

Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed; small kindnesses can make a big difference.

Lord, teach us today the grace of Kingdom living.

Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which, with surprise, we discover.

Lord, teach us today the wisdom of Kingdom living.

Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven is like a pearl of great value, we give all of ourselves to be part of it.

A BRIEF CONFESSION

Lord have mercy.

We have missed the mark of your desire for our lives.

Christ have mercy.

We have not turned ourselves around from patterns of living contrary to your will.

Lord have mercy.

Forgive, renew, and guide us into a newness of life in Christ Jesus.

God forgives, Christ renews, and the Holy Spirit guides us to life anew.

Live now, as the redeemed People of God.

GREETING

The Lord be with you

May God's Kingdom be present here in this hour of worship.

May God's Kingdom be present in each of us in what we say and do.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1st Reading – Psalm 119: 129-135

Your decrees are wonderful;

therefore my soul keeps them.

The unfolding of your words gives light;

it imparts understanding to the simple.

With open mouth I pant,

because I long for your commandments.

Turn to me and be gracious to me,

as is your custom towards those who love your name.

Keep my steps steady according to your promise,

and never let iniquity have dominion over me.

Redeem me from human oppression,

that I may keep your precepts.

Make your face shine upon your servant,

and teach me your statutes.

Gospel reading – Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-45

He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

SERMON

Pentecost 8

MUSTARD SEED BEGINNINGS

July 26, 2020

Matthew 13:31-32

I'm going to share with you

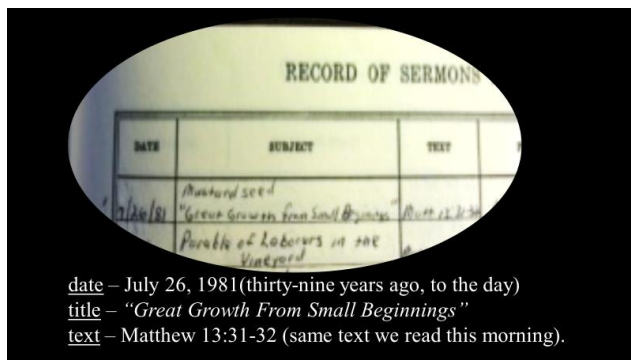
something that is almost “spooky” in its coincidental nature ... OR, another way of seeing it, something that is divine serendipity in its impeccable spiritual timing.

Just shy of forty years ago,

I preached my very 1st sermon to begin my pastoral vocation ... the text was Matthew 13:31-32 – Jesus' Parable of the Mustard Seed.

The date that I preached

that 1st sermon was July 26, 1981... thirty-nine years ago to the day that I am giving the last sermon of my pastoral career – and the text, Jesus' Parable of the Mustard Seed



screen 1

Here is the recordation of that

1st sermon written in this book (called “*My Pastoral Record*”) ... note the date, title, and text:

date – July 26, 1981 (thirty-nine years ago, to the day)

title – “*Great Growth From Small Beginnings*”

text – Matthew 13:31-32 (same text we read this morning).

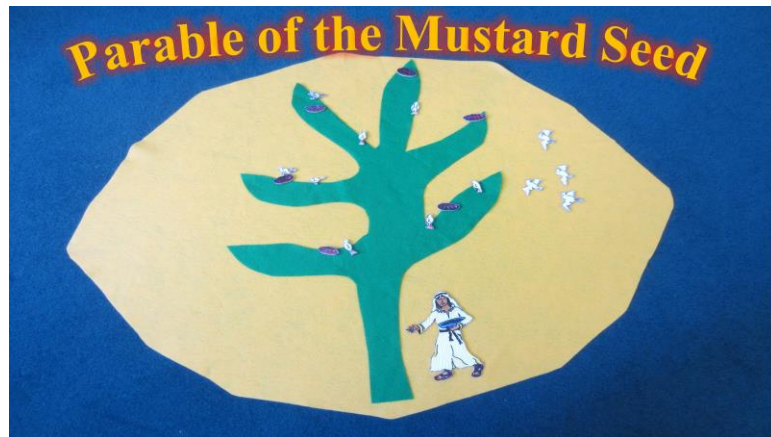
Now, over that thirty-six-year span

of time ... adding in the yearly six-week Lenten season,
36 years of Christmases, along with
wedding and funeral meditations given ... I been in the pulpit over 2400 times
giving a sermon based on some text in
the Bible.

I would say that there is a

Mustard Seed lesson in all of that ... a lesson about the strange and marvelous ways
of Gods Kingdom

Jesus tells many parables
about the Kingdom of God (it was his favorite subject) ... and the one most familiar to
many of us is the Mustard Seed Parable.



screen 2

The purpose of these
Kingdom of God parables as Jesus tells them is to heighten the many, many ways that
God's Kingdom is to be understood & experienced in this life as we live each day.

I was a shy introverted young man
back in 1981 (and still am in many ways) and I never thought on that day 39 years ago,
that I would be giving over 2000 more sermons

For me ... I've experienced God's Kingdom
every week for thirty-nine years each time a sermon is written, practiced, and given ... it
started as a Mustard Seed back on July 26, 1981.

And I believe

that as each of those 2000 plus sermons were given ... God threw out more mustard seeds
into the congregations of people who heard them.

Today, I want to give you a little peek

of how that mustard seed of God's Spirit worked it's way into my life 39 years ago as I was preparing to give my first ever sermon.

Just before

walking into her room, I checked the patient list to make sure I had her name

correct ... I knocked on the door,

I heard, "come in".

I said, "Hi Mrs. **Bowditch**, I'm Chaplain Lawrence, how are you today?"

She said, "I'm fine, but I'm not Mrs. **Bowditch**".

I said, "I'm sorry, who then do I have the pleasure of meeting?"

She said, "You have the pleasure of meeting Mrs. **BOWditch** ... you said, **Bowditch**, that's not my name. It's BOW-ditch as in a **BOW** & **ARROW**; not **Bow** – **DICH** as in the bow of a boat. Don't call me Mary **BowDICH**

She was an eighty-four year old black woman with an attitude (for sure) and with diabetes causing one leg to be amputated at the knee ... the attitude was admirable (spunky & full of wit), the diabetes and consequent amputation was "the way it is" as she put it.

I was in CPE (clinical Pastoral Education), every candidate

for the ordained ministry in the Lutheran Church is required to take it ... CPE gives seminary students their first taste of visiting people in the hospital as clergy, as a pastor.

CPE is a time of "firsts" ... 1st time praying out loud with people

1st time talking with people nearing death, or being with them at the time of death

1st time being with folks in the midst of tragedy.

Those were many of the "firsts"

I experienced in CPE ... but there was another that raised my anxiety level more than all of those – PREACHING A SERMON.

Every month the CPE supervisor would ask

for volunteers to preach at the hospital chapel service on Sunday morning ... though it wasn't required, many students seemed eager to volunteer.

What is wrong with me, I wondered,
shouldn't I be as eager as these others ... maybe I'm, not cut out to be a preacher like I
thought, maybe I should reconsider this whole idea.

Come to find out, many of the other students

had already preached many times before ... in their home church, at college, or at some

Christian Youth Group event when they were in high school.

I didn't have any "sermon notches" on my "*pastor to be belt*"
nor was I in any hurry to put one there ... So, I began to have this conversation
with myself: "*How long do I think I can put this off? If I want to be a pastor,
I'm going to have to preach sooner or later. That's what pastor's
do. That's why they call us preachers.*"

So, on the very last week of the very last month
of CPE training, when the supervisor asked for volunteers, I raised my hand and took
last Sunday in July, July 26th.

This gets me back to Mary **BOW**dich ... my time for visiting with her was winding down
and I had come to know her better than most patients, in fact we had many conversations
about faith, life, and those "why" questions of God we often want to ask.

When I told her of the upcoming sermon

I was scheduled to preach at the hospital chapel, she asked me what the text was from
which I would be basing my talk ... that's what she called a sermon – a "talk".

Mary was raised on the Bible in the African American Methodist Church ... so when she
asked about what the scripture was for the sermon, she wanted to read it ahead of time
to be prepared to hear what the preacher would say, in his "talk".

When I told her it was

the Parable of the Mustard Seed, here's what she did AND said ... I can still see it AND hear

her words: **She kicked back in her wheel chair, her white teeth gleaming
through her full dark lips, and she said: "Ah, the Parable of the
Mustard Seed, a good parable for you to begin your preaching career."**

The Friday before the Sunday I was

to preach (or, should I say – give my talk) I stopped to see Mary as it would be the last
visit I would make with her ... she knew how nervous I was about this sermon thing.

After the initial “how are you” on my part, she got right to her agenda (somehow, she knew I would come to see her one last time ... she said, *“I heard there’s a real good preacher com’in to town this week, gonna be at the chapel here at the hospital. I’m go’in ... wanta hear what the preacher gotta say in his talk.”*

Still smiling, she reached into the bag strapped to her wheelchair and pulled out a little white sack tied tight at the top with a string ... *“Mustard seeds*



screen 3

she said, *for you, for Sunday. Gonna be one “heck” of a talk, she whispered loudly.”*

I thanked her,

We shared in a prayer and said our goodbyes.

I walked out the door holding

that little pouch of seed in my hand ... and that little pouch of seed made it into the pulpit with me Sunday morning on July 26, 1981 – it made its way into the very first sermon I ever gave.

It also made its way into my life

because it was a what I call today *“a sermon mustard seed”* and it was sown into the field of a pastor’s life who’s vocation of being a preacher has spanned over 39 years and over 2000’s sermons written & preached.

That’s my personal parable of how the Mustard Seed is like

the Kingdom of God ... the Kingdom of God is God working in your life in small ways

(through others often times) to bring forward into the world God’s message of grace,
God’s intention, desire & call
God’s compassion,
God’s love.

Bethany has mustard seed stories where seeds have been sown into the lives of people.



screen 4

Over the course of 12 years

Bethany has been part of 23 baptisms,
11 confirmations
11 marriages ... Bethany received
117 new members in the last 12 years.

And this faith community has been part of participating in
the mustard seed *of an individual life* coming into its full fruit & bloom by being the place
where 48 funerals celebrated the life of individuals who now reside with their Creator.

Mustard Seeds

And there is more ... In the last six years (with Family Promise)

Bethany has housed and fed over 90 families;
gave the money to provide breakfast for those families; and
generously gave over \$4000 to help Family Promise in its mission to fight homelessness.

Mustard Seeds

And there is still more ... Lunches have been faithfully packed and delivered to a men's
homeless shelter;
Bethany gives \$4500 a year to Homeward Bound – a shelter for
women and children fleeing domestic violence;
Bethany provides space for scouting programs and twelve-step
programs ... ***Mustard Seeds***

Don't ever minimize how important these ministries are ... they may be
the Mustard Seed in someone's life bringing God and God's grace of healing into a
broken and hurting places ... and that mustard seed can grow to witness to the power of God.

I'm going to leave you with a little pouch

of Mustard Seeds ... may they always be a reminder as Bethany launches into a new chapter
of ministry - that there is nothing too small that cannot bear the fruit of God's Kingdom.

The faith community is God's storehouse for mustard seeds. Bethany has Mustard Seeds to sow.

Mary Bowdich came to that Sunday morning hospital chapel service

where a seminary student was to preach his first sermon ... she was in the front row, in her wheel chair listening to a very "green" preacher to give his first "talk".

She sowed some mustard seeds in a preacher's life, that's all God asked her to do ... she didn't know, at the time, she would be referenced some thirty years later in a sermon from that same preacher giving his "talk" to a congregation on his last Sunday there.

That's how Kingdom seeds work ... we are called to be faithful in the sowing, that's all.

Mustard Seed Ministry is about

the small things we do or about the small things sometimes that happen to us where our lives get wrapped-up in the bigness of God's Kingdom. Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We believe in God, the source of all life, wholeness, and love.

We believe that God is revealed in Jesus Christ.

We believe that in his life, Jesus reveals God in grace, mercy, forgiveness, and justice.

We believe that in his death, Jesus reveals God's determined presence in the world even in the face of hatred, violence, and pain.

We believe that in his resurrection, Jesus reveals God calling us to abundant life both now and forever; to move beyond fear and to trust in God's eternal presence.

We believe that God lives among us, within us, and through us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that God moves us to be together in communities of faith, hope, and love.

We believe these things not out of certainty but out of faith and we trust in the constant presence of God revealed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Amen

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God of constant presence and blessing ... We pray for your nurture upon the mustard seeds inside each one of us, that we may grow in the ways of your love and service to be the hands of Jesus in the world. We pray for you nurture upon the mustard seeds present in our church, that we as a community of faith we become a beacon of light in our neighborhood. We pray for your nurture upon the mustard seeds present in the world, that more and more we all can move and change to become a purer expression of your desire and intention. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

God of constant presence and blessing ... We pray for peace. Where there is hatred and division, sow seeds of love and healing. We pray for provision. Where there is hunger and homeless, sow seeds of abundance and

shelter. In each of us there are mustard seeds of peace and provision. Cause them to grow so that we, as individuals and as a faith community, become voices of peace and agents of provision. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

God of constant presence and blessing ... We pray for Bethany members on our prayer list. Give them the blessing of your presence amid their times of trial. We pray for our congregation in this time of suspended worship that we will still continue to be a committed community of faith seeking to be the light of Jesus in our community and world. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

God of constant presence and blessing ... We pray for our world in a time of pandemic and societal distress and change. Give our leaders wisdom, compassion, insight, and courage to lead in ways that serve all the people under their charge. We pray for doctors and nurses, EMT's, and all those on the frontline of healthcare amid this COVID-19 pandemic. Give them health, energy, compassion, and the strength to care for those struggling with illness and hospitalization. In your grace and love Lord ... hear our prayer.

Listen to each of us, Lord, as we come to you in a moment of silent prayer

Into your hands, great and compassionate God, we commend all for whom and about which we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OFFERING *(Please mail your weekly offering to the church - 4300 N 82nd St. Scottsdale, AZ 85251)*

PRAYER OF BLESSING

Let us pray:

*In the wonder of your abundance, O Lord, we are blessed with the gifts of life. Teach us generosity to give where there is need. Teach us compassion to give where there is hurt. Teach us love to give where there is emptiness. You are a God of abundance; teach us to live abundantly in service to you.
AMEN*

THE LORD'S PRAYER

You may say traditional Lord's Prayer or use the Aramaic translation printed below or you may say both in succession

*O Creator, the one who gave birth to the universe,
You are the sacred source of our being.*

*Focus Your ways, Your light, within us.
Make us useful for Your purposes here on earth so that
Your desire and our lives become one.*

Grant what we need each day in bread and insight.

*Loosen the cords of mistakes binding us,
as we release the strands we hold of other's guilt.*

*Do not let surface things delude us, snare us, and lead us away
from You and Your purpose.*

*But free us from what holds us back, give us power to
live as you intended and created us to live.*

*From You comes the all-working will, the lively strength to act,
the song that beautifies all and renews itself from age to age. AMEN*

CLOSING OF A PASTORAL MINISTRY

The president addresses the pastor whose call is concluding with these or similar words.

Pastor Rick Lawrence, on February , 2008, we of Bethany Lutheran called you to be pastor in this place: to proclaim God's word, to baptize and teach, to announce God's forgiveness, and to preside at the Lord's table. With the gospel you have comforted us in times of sickness and trouble, and at the death of our loved ones. Sharing our joys and sorrows, you [and your family] have been important to our life together in the church of Jesus Christ, in our service to this community, and in God's mission to the whole world. As you leave this community of faith, and retire after 36 years of ministry, we say farewell, and we pray for God's blessing.

The president addresses the assembly with these or similar words.

People of God, members of Bethany, we release Pastor Lawrence from service as our *pastor*. We give thanks to God for our ministry together.

The leader addresses the person whose call is concluding.

Pastor Lawrence do you recognize and accept the completion of your ministry with Bethany?

Response: I do, and I give thanks to God for our ministry together.

Bishop: Thanksgiving and Sending

Let us pray.

Almighty God, through your Son Jesus Christ

you gave the holy apostles many gifts and commanded them to feed your flock.

You equip your people with abilities that differ according to the grace given to them, and you call them to various avenues of service.

We give you thanks for the ministry of Pastor Lawrence among the people of God in this place.

You watch over our going out and our coming in:

bless this time of ending and beginning.

You surround your people in every time and place:

keep us close in your love.

You accompany your people in times of joy and times of trial:

prosper all that has been done to your glory in this time together;

heal and forgive all that has fallen short of your will for us.

Help Pastor Lawrence and *his* family and all of us

to live with courage and gladness in the future you give to us.

As *they* have been a blessing to us,

so now send us forth to be a blessing to others;

through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Your sisters and brothers in the Grand Canyon Synod

and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

give thanks to God for the ministry you have shared.

We promise you our continued support and prayer.

Rejoicing in the blessings of God in this congregation

and in the ministry of Pastor Rick Lawrence,
with hope in God's abundant grace in years to come,
I announce that Pastor Lawrence's service as pastor in this congregation
is now concluded.

Bishop: Blessing
The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.
The Lord look upon you with favor and ✝ give you peace.
Amen.

DISMISSAL

*Go and be the bearers of God's Kingdom for the good of the world.
We go empowered by the mighty and generous spirit of Jesus. Thanks be to God.*