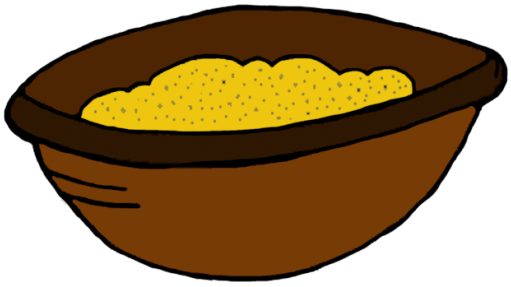
Parable of the Mustard Seed



Scripture Reference: Mark 4:30-34

Suggested Theme: God grows the smallest beginnings into big things. Continue to serve him humbly in even the smallest ways.

Memory Verse: “With God’s power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we can ask or think of.” Ephesians 3:20, ICB

Story Overview:

Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like a little mustard seed. When this little seed is planted, it grows into a huge plant, many times the size of the little seed.

Background Study:

Information about teaching the Parables

This parable is a great one for children. Often, children feel very insignificant in the church. Sometimes, they get the “children are to be seen and not heard” attitude, or they are just ignored. Children can be good and try their best, but adults at church might only notice them when they are “noisy’ or “running around.” They are literally small – like the mustard seed. They need to see how they fit into God’s family. They need to know that they can play a part in helping the kingdom grow.

As a Bible teacher who teaches children, be an ambassador for the children of your congregation. Gently remind people that they were little seeds once, themselves. Remind them to be patient with the children. Encourage them to guide and nurture them and not just judge them. Also, find ways to get the old and young together. Host an afternoon tea where the children you teach have done some baking for the elderly. Arrange to have the group you teach visit someone in their home to read Scriptures and sing songs to them. You will be amazed at the bridges you build.

The parable in today’s lesson can also be found in Matthew 13:31-32 and Luke 13:18-19.

A familiar sight in Palestine was a six to twelve-foot mustard bush filled with a flock of birds. The birds enjoyed feasting on the tiny black seeds. Mustard seeds were cultivated for their oil during biblical times and ground into powder for culinary and medicinal purposes.

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The significant lesson that Jesus draws from the mustard plant is the fact that a huge, significant plant can come from a small, insignificant beginning, like a little seed. This is parallel to the Kingdom of God. Think of all of the insignificant events that hold such huge meanings: a little out-of-the-way town of Bethlehem, an animal's manger, an obscure carpenter and his young wife, a bunch of uneducated fishermen, a few loaves and a couple of fish, a rooster crowing, a tree that's wood would someday be a cross, a tomb with a stone rolled away.

Sometimes, the little part we play in the Kingdom seems insignificant. Perhaps we feel that our congregation is so small that it cannot accomplish much in the grand scheme of things. The parable of the mustard seed is a lesson to us that huge things can happen as the result of a very small thing. There were only a very few believers in the beginning, but the number of people who followed Jesus grew and grew. That is only because those first few told a few. Then those told a few. Then those told some more …

Way to Introduce the Story:

Try this introduction before you teach the lesson, or make it part of the storytime. Provide a few different types of seeds and seed packets so the children can examine them. Compare the different types of seeds. Discuss the type of plant that will grow from each seed. Continue to point out that huge plants will grow from these very small seeds. You could also cut some fruit and look at the seeds inside (then eat the fruit, of course). Strawberries are a good example because the seeds are on the outside, and they are very small compared to the fruit. Other interesting choices are bananas, cucumbers, passion fruit and more. You might also be able to show acorns that grow into huge trees. If a tree is nearby, guide the children in looking at it and even finding seeds, if possible.

These activities should naturally bring you to a point where you might say, "Jesus once told a parable about a very small type of seed. Let's listen to the story."

The Story:

(Follow the instructions for the introduction section above or bring some seeds to use in this story. Make sure you have a mustard seed. You can usually buy these in the spice section of the grocery.)

Sometimes, people think that they are not important to God. They want to do things to help the church, but they think that the things they do are not important.

Sometimes, they just give up because they feel sad.

Some people think they are too old to help the church. "I'm just one old woman," they might say. "There's nothing I can do to help except sew clothes for poor people."

Kids sometimes think they are too young to help the church. "I'm just a little kid. No one expects me to help the church. I can only do little things like come to Sunday School."

Some people might think that their actions are unimportant, so they stop helping the church. "I can only do little things like vacuuming the floor or straightening the song books," they say. "No one will notice if I don't do those little things. Those little things don't help the church anyway."

Sometimes, people are sad because they think their church is too small. They say, "No one will want to come to my church. It is too small."

Some of the people who followed Jesus thought those things, too. Jesus wanted to teach the people something new. He wanted them to know that everything we do to help others is important. The big things are important, and the little things are important. Sometimes, we do a little thing, and it ends up making a BIG difference.

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Jesus wanted the people to understand this important truth, so he told them a parable about a seed. Does anyone know what a seed is? (Let the children answer.) A seed is a beginning. A seed is often very small, and it looks like it could never be anything important. (Show some seeds.) Seeds look like they are small and not important, but seeds are only the beginning of something. A very small seed can grow into something very big. (Tell or show what plants come from the seeds you brought).

The parable Jesus told was about a mustard seed. (Show one if you have it.) He said that once, a man planted a very tiny mustard seed in his garden. It was a very small seed, but it was only the beginning. As time passed, the seed grew into a little plant.

It grew more and more every day. As the years went by, the plant became a big tree. Birds would come and sit on the tree's branches.

Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. Things might look very small at the beginning, but just wait – someday, they can be very, very, very big! Just keep doing the little things, and God will make them grow.

So, are the things older people do too small? No, remember the mustard seed!

Are kids too little to help the church? No, remember the mustard seed!

Should we stop doing little jobs like vacuuming and straightening songbooks? No, remember the mustard seed!

Should we give up because our church is too small? No, remember the mustard seed!

How can you remember the story of the mustard seed? What can you do to help?

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What type of seed does Jesus refer to as the smallest seed planted in a garden? (Mustard seed)
- What is amazing about a very small mustard seed? (When it is planted, it grows into the largest plant in the garden)

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- What does Jesus say mustard seeds are like? (The kingdom of heaven)
- Why is it still important to help people and help the church, even if we can only do “little” things? (Little things are only the beginnings of big things)
- What does this story show you about God?
- What does this story show you about people?
- What does this story show you about the kingdom of heaven?

Reflection:

- How is a mustard seed like the kingdom of heaven?
- What is something you wonder about in this story?
- What part of this story did you enjoy the most?
- Why do you think Jesus told this parable?
- What do you think this parable means? What was Jesus trying to teach us?
- When has someone said or done something small for you that made a big impact on you?
- Jesus said the smallest seed grew into one of the biggest trees in the garden. How do you think Jesus thinks about people who are small or young?
- (*Question for older children*) Jesus says wild birds came and made their nests on the mustard tree’s branches. What do you think the wild birds represent in this parable?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- I’m in the Lord’s Army Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Make some sandwiches using mustard as one of the ingredients.
- Play “hangman” using words from the story (mustard, tree, Mark, plant, grow, etc.)
- List ways we can tell people about the church.

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- Have a guest share examples of how children have helped them. Many people start going to church to be better parents to their children.
- Ask the children to share what they want to be when they "grow up." Follow that up by brainstorming how Christians in that profession can serve God and serve the church. Conclude the discussion with a prayer to serve God no matter what profession they choose.
- Show a series of circles of ever-increasing sizes to help pre-schoolers understand the concept of something little becoming big. These can be drawn on paper or cut from coloured paper. If desired, you can also print this template onto coloured paper.
- Another way to help young children better understand the process of growing from small to big is to play with matryoshka dolls (stacking dolls) and note the progression of sizes.
- Find a project that the children can do to help the church. They might make gifts for shut-ins or someone who is sick. They could collect food for the food pantry or clothing for someone in need. They might letterbox evangelistic material or make a bulletin board encouraging people to attend church or some event.
- Make a prayer list and lead the children in prayer. This is one way anyone, at any age, can help the church.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Purchase mustard seeds from the spice section of the grocery. Make any tree craft and then glue a mustard seed near the trunk.
- Make a fridge magnet by gluing a small magnet strip to the back of the cardboard. You can buy magnet strips at craft shops. Decorate the card with the words "Big things come from little things like mustard seeds" and glue a mustard seed to it.
- Decorate a poster or other craft with the memory verse on it

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Craft: Mustard seed wreath (kid ministry resources.blogspot.co.nz)
- Bible verses about children (whatchristianswanttoknow.com)

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