

Sermon June 16, 2024

Mustard Seed Faith

There's a picture that pops up on Facebook occasionally. It's a cat, teeth bared, vicious expression in his eye, gliding through the water. "They told me I could be anything, so I became a crocodile."

We do tell our children they can be anything – it's part of the American dream. No matter who you are or where you come from, you can be anything you want to be. Ask a group of children what they want to be and you will hear all kinds of answers: the President of the US, the next superstar, even Superman. The possibilities seem endless. If you want it, it will happen.

And there are plenty of stories in or history that show how far one person can go. Presidents and CEOs who begin with nothing and, with a little luck and a lot of hard work, end up with a whole bunch.

Steve Jobs proved that you really can be anything. Adopted into a lower middle-class family, a history of struggles throughout his elementary and high school, a college dropout... at 20 he seemed destined to a life living in his parents' garage. But, instead, he used his parents' garage to found Apple Computers. When he died, he had more money than some 3rd world countries.

Yes, it seems like you can be anything you want to be.

But of course, there are limits. Cats can't really become crocodiles; little boys can't really become superheroes from Krypton. We can't really be ANYTHING we want to be, no matter how much we want it.

But today, we are reminded of the possibilities found in God. God can take that which is seemingly small and create wonderful things.

We can be whatever God wants us to be.

Look at David, just a little boy, in whom God saw great things. Tending his sheep in the field, he never dreamed that God would call him to be a king. But God saw something special in David and led Samuel straight to him. "This is the one," God said, "This is the future King of my chosen people," a lineage that stretched all the way to Jesus.

We really can be anything God wants us to be. No matter who we are or where we come from, God calls us to new and unimaginable possibilities. We just have to have faith... A little faith, as small as a tiny mustard seed.

Look at this mustard seed, we are told, see how small it is? But look what it will grow into in the right soil. And what is that? A magnificent redwood, a glorious oak? No, but it will be a great big shrub. Is that all? That doesn't impress me much!

Yet that shrub offers shade and protection to God's beloved creatures. It does exactly what God wants it to do and be what God needs it to be.

It really is a matter of perspective and expectations. If we expect bad things to happen, they generally do. Sociologists call it self-fulfilling prophecy. If we allow our perspective to be limited, we leave out the opportunity for the transformative power of God to come forth.

If we look at that little seed and see only a little seed, we miss out on all the possibilities it brings. As it grows, we will think, "see, it's just a little sprout... good for nothing."

If we look at the world around us, and see only the problems- inflation and violence and cruelty, we will block out our opportunities for change. Every time something happens it will confirm our view, we will say "see, I told you the world is rotten to the core."

But if we look at the seed... if we look at the world... through God's eyes, we can see endless possibilities.

Jesus was able to see beyond what we see to the new possibility. He viewed others and saw what they would become as a result of the liberating power of God's love. An ordinary fisherman becomes the rock on which the whole church would be built. A dishonest tax collector becomes a trusted friend and disciple. Outsiders are invited to be leaders. The unclean are restored to fellowship. The hopelessly ill are made well again. An angry Pharisee who persecutes Jesus' followers becomes the apostle to the gentiles and brings the Word to the whole world.

People who heard and believed the good news of the gospel were liberated from the prison of a negative perspective and given instead a perspective of possibility through the transforming power and liberating love of God. Good things are possible not because of our own efforts, but because of the redemptive power of God.

When Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is like a teeny, small grain of mustard seed which becomes the greatest of all shrubs, he is inviting us to look at the world with new eyes.

So today, I follow the God who showed up two thousand years ago in small ways on days of small things. Who took the smallest and transformed them. Who takes us and transforms us too. A healing touch here. A compassionate word there. Small things that lead to new possibilities. Small things that lead to new life.