

There's a truth we need to come to terms with or else we will only find ourselves banging our head against the wall. The truth is this—God is a big God who likes to work through small things to accomplish his desired results. Certainly, he's capable of working big results with a big show of his mighty power and he does that on occasion. Like when he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone, or Egypt with the plagues, or when the Angel of the LORD slaughtered 185,000 enemy soldiers in one night.

But so much of what God does is tied to small means and small beginnings. Remember one of the times Jesus chose to display his power and glory to everyone. He didn't go up on the mountain and display all his dazzling glory before the giant crowd. That he only did for a few of his closest friends. Instead he took a small boy's small lunch and used it to display his glory as he fed the multitude of 5,000 people with it.

Or think about the Gospel lesson for today. Of all the things that Jesus could compare the kingdom of God to, why on earth would he pick a mustard seed, the smallest little seed. Compared to the immensity of God, it just seems so piddly and we get frustrated by that. It's like, "Sheesh, Jesus!" Why pick such small things? You can do what you want. Go bigger! More Horsepower! Forget messing around with a dinky little mustard seed. Make the kingdom of God like a grove of big honking Redwood trees.

Because we come with the wrong set expectations—big God, big means, big results—we begin to despair of the small means God uses and even more we despise his timing. And when we do, we can contract a few very dangerous syndromes that leave our faith in an unhealthy spot. One we might call Elijah syndrome, a syndrome of self-pity. **Woe is me! "I'm the only one left."** The Old Testament prophet Elijah lived during a rough time in Israel's history, under King Ahab, one of the worst of the kings, who led his people into Baal worship. Because the times were so rough, and many of the people had rejected God, Elijah started to get down-in-the-dumps depressed, **"I've had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."** (1 Kings 19:4). And then he lay down wanting to die.

Elijah syndrome can be very dangerous if it causes us to look out at the world and think, "What a bunch of sinners! The world is all headed to hell in a hand-basket and we're the only ones left. After all, we belong to a small church body of not even 350,000 people, which compared to the 7.9 billion people on earth doesn't even register as a fraction of a percent. We better just hold up, keep our heads down, and wait it out until we die. Self-Pity can lead to inaction and despair about the promises of God.

How did the Lord rebuke and restore Elijah's syndrome? Not in the mighty wind or the earthquake, or in the fire, but in a *still small voice*, a gentle whisper, a word from his mouth. God revealed to Elijah that his ministry was not for nothing, but that there were still 7,000 in Israel faithful to the Lord. Then he told Elijah to get up and get back to work.

There's another dangerous syndrome we might contract, a little different from the first, one we might call "Glory Days" syndrome. Much later in Old Testament history, God had graciously brought his exiled people back from captivity in Babylon. He had commanded them to begin rebuilding the temple, which had been completely destroyed. When they finished laying the foundation, a momentous moment for them to appreciate God's mercy as they were beginning to rebuild, **"Many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid."** (Ezra 3:12). They wept because to them it was underwhelming, nowhere near the grandeur of

Solomon's glorious temple. It didn't match up to the glory days gone by, and so they were disappointed with the mercy God had shown them.

How did God diagnose and correct "Glory Days" syndrome? He sent the prophet Zechariah with this message, **"Who dares despise the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10).** This may seem like a small feat, but God's little remnant of people was regrowing from the stump that had been cut down. God needed to remind his people of the way he so often delights to work, **"not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,"** But that doesn't mean he doesn't accomplish big results. What did Jesus say, **"The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."** (Mark 4:31,32).

If we still doubt the results that God brings through such small, inconsequential and unimpressive means, we need only look at our text for today from Paul's letter to the Colossians. The setting didn't look so good! Paul, the church's most powerful apostle was sitting under house arrest. The devil was busy sowing the seeds of false teaching all over the world and some of those seeds had taken root and were confusing the congregation in Colosse. So much so that it worried their pastor, a man named Epaphras, who had started this congregation in the city of Colosse. So Epaphras traveled nearly 1000 miles to Rome to bring his report to Paul and seek counsel about some of the troubles there. Paul's response is the letter we call the book of Colossians.

But before Paul gets into the doctrinal nitty gritty that needed to be addressed, Paul stops to recognize and give thanks for the fruit the gospel had borne in Colosse, which Epaphras had reported with excitement. Paul says, **"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all God's people—the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven."**

Something small and special had happened in Colosse, in fact just what Jesus had described in the other parable from today's gospel lesson. **"A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."** Epaphras, whom Paul describes as a faithful minister of Christ, had scattered seed and God made it grow! He didn't exactly know how or when, but now he had seen the growth and the fruit and the harvest had come. The Colossians had been bearing fruit and he could tell Paul about their "love in the Spirit." (Colossians 1:8).

What was it that brought this all about? A tiny seed. Their faith and love had sprung from the hope of heaven which they had heard about in the true message of the gospel, a tiny seed planted in their hearts. Then Paul lays forth a constant truth that snaps us out of both "Elijah syndrome and "Glory Days" syndrome". **"The gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace."**(1:6) Hear it again, **"The gospel is bearing fruit and growing."** God's Word goes out to build his kingdom.

It is, always, growing and bearing fruit. Even when it seems like across our nation, pews are getting emptier and churches are shrinking and the youth are falling away. Church statistics will always paint a gloomy picture especially after COVID, but they can't overwhelm

the promise Jesus gives us: the Church will continue breaking down the gates of hell with the gospel of forgiveness until he returns.

So how do we change our expectations and our perspective about the means and the timing of how God brings this about? Sometimes we need help visualizing in order to adjust our mindset. That why Jesus the master teacher used parable so often. So here is a comparison that helped me visualize what really happening.

First, I want you to think about Ant-Man. Why Ant-Man? Ant-Man is one of the more unknown Avengers. He doesn't get all the press like Hulk, or Iron Man, or Captain America. But Ant-Man has a very interesting power. His suit allows him to shrink down to the size of an ant in an instant. A strange power no doubt, but it means he can get into just about anywhere. And since the mass of a 200-pound man is shrunk into the size of an ant, it means his tiny little ant fist packs a powerful punch, 200 pounds worth!

Next, I want you to consider one of the ways the Bible pictures Jesus from the book of Revelation. The apostle John describes a Rider on a white horse whose name is "The Word of God". This rider is a valiant conqueror who wears a crown and rides out with his bow, bent on conquest and all the armies of heaven, arrayed in white linen, are following behind him on white horses. Imagine this immense battle scene across the whole horizon of heaven and there's no doubt who is going to win—the Rider on the White Horse, he can't be trifled with. This is how Revelation pictures Jesus as a valiant conqueror marching out with the gospel of forgiveness for the world.

Now I want you to take that glorious battle scene of the Rider on the White horse and use Ant-Man's shrinking suit to shrink it down to the size of a little tiny seed, like a mustard seed. And imagine that every time one of those seeds is planted in the soil of someone's heart, the Rider on the White Horse and all the hosts of heaven go bursting forth into glorious battle with the Word of God, and they break forth out of that tiny seed and spring to life to claim the heart of newly born child of God.

It may appear to the blind eye like nothing is happening at all. It will not make headlines, nor draw the attention of the world's great and powerful, but my friends, don't be mistaken! **The gospel grows from small beginnings as God's Word goes out it build his kingdom.** It's a gentle word of forgiveness spoken that finally takes the chains of guilt and throws them into the depths of the sea. It's water sprinkled in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that washes away sin and seals a place in God's own family. Jesus and his gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world just as it has produced a harvest among you. This is how you should expect to see it, in small beginnings, by small means, with powerful results.

Today we'll close in the same way that Paul begins his letter to the Colossians, thanking God for the gospel's work in the hearts of believers. This weekend we have the privilege to welcome new members into our Family Growing in Christ. A number of these new members have been recently baptized and today will be confirmed in the faith they've come to understand and believe. We thank God for each of them and the work of the gospel seed in their hearts. Finally, we'll pray Paul's prayer for them and our whole congregation, **"We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience." In Jesus' Name. Amen.**