



faith in action

“Growing into the new creation”

“He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. 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” Mark 4:26-27

Lesson: Anyone who has ever planted a flower bed or garden knows that getting your hands dirty isn't the only thing needed to produce a bountiful harvest. Seeds also require the right environment, which includes proper temperature, oxygen, water, and in some cases light, to grow up healthy and strong – and lest we forget – a whole lot of patience, time, and God's loving power! When all of these elements work together, the seed is able to grow to become a source of life and comfort for all of God's creation. Jesus teaches us that our faith is a lot like little seeds. It too needs the proper environment to take root in our hearts and grow. The seed of our faith is fostered through scripture, prayer, the church, and evangelism, as well as a whole lot of patience, time, and God's tender loving care. And when the seed of our trust in and love for Jesus grows, we too can help give God's promise of life and renewal to others...and so on, and so on, and so on.

This week, put faith in action by...

Show and Tell

A little over halfway through his ministry, Jesus began to increasingly teach his followers using parables. Because parables are a story with a hidden meaning that can sometimes be difficult to understand, it may seem peculiar that Jesus chose this ancient form of storytelling to educate the masses about God and the Kingdom. Two of the big advantages of parables, however, are their relatability to everyday life and the ease by which they can be remembered and so retold over and over again.

Parables can also be pretty timeless, which means that they are still able to pack a punch over 2K years after their initial telling. Just look at the parables of the growing seed and mustard seed found in this week's lesson from Mark: 4:26-34. Ancient Israel may have been an agrarian society but we don't need to be farmers to understand seeds start off small only to grow into something big over time. We also don't have to be grown-up to get the point either.

Because parables are essential to understanding Jesus' teachings and also tell us so much about God in an applicable way, it's a good idea to introduce them to your child/children early on in their own faith maturation process. (Besides, who doesn't love a good story?!?) The beauty of the parables of the growing seed and mustard seed is that you don't have to just tell it to your child/children, you can also show it in real time!

So, this week, why not take a little patience and time to do some seed and faith planting with your child/children by first sharing Jesus' parable(s) and then showing them what Jesus meant with a little gardening 101. Assign the responsibility of caring for the seeds to your child/children and then encourage them to share the fruits of their labor (and faith) with someone when their plants bloom.

I Know I Can!

Face it! It's not always easy being little in a big world! (Just think back a few years!) Children, in other words, see all the woes and injustices this planet has to offer and yet can feel too small and powerless to help bring about change. They may even think that their contribution in church doesn't make too much of a difference. That's why enlightening them with Jesus' seed parables (Mark 4: 26 – 34) is so important!

Start off with a *little* detective work by scoping the biggest tree you can find with your child/children and then take an inventory of all of the benefits that tree is offering to various parts of creation (i.e., birds' and/or squirrels' nests, leaves that serve as food for insects or other critters, surrounding trees that may have come from its seed, shade for animals and people including your family, etc.). Follow up by taking advantage of that little seed's big shade while talking to your child/children about how much good came from such a small start. And then double down on Jesus' parabolic message by helping your little mustard seed take an inventory of some of the big thing they can start doing for God at home, in the church, and in the community – maybe even the world! And then help them start planting!



Parable Writer

Jesus didn't invent the fine art of parabolic storytelling. The parable can be traced as far back in the Bible as Hebrew scripture. The prophet, Nathan, in fact uses a parable to open King David's eyes to his sin in taking the married Bathsheba as his own (and then having her husband murdered) (II Samuel 12:1-13).

Jesus similarly uses the parable to open the eyes of his followers (including us) to the truths about God and God's Kingdom – truths, that is, that are far too big for our human minds to grasp much rather fully understand like God's unconditional love and unending forgiveness, the Creator's extreme desire to be in relationship with his beloved creation, and God's Kingdom.

This week, help your child/children put into words how God's love feels to them by writing their very own parable. Give them a head-start by providing the opening line ala Jesus' parable of the mustard seed – "the Kingdom of God is like" (Mark 4:30). Only invite your child/children to substitute what they are describing in place of the Kingdom of God (i.e., God's love is like...). Encouraging them to make a book of their very own parables explaining their relationship with God/Jesus will help their faith to grow big and strong *just like* a mustard tree!

Yes, We Can, Can!

Who better to know the big possibilities of little kids other than kids??? From activists fighting for the right of education to environmental stewards, this site offers 40 examples of trailblazing "mustard seeds" who weren't (and aren't) afraid to dream big.

This week, take some time to share a few with your child/children and then help them find their passion so that they too can start making a big difference in and for God's creation in their own little way!

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+4%3A30-32&version=ICB>

You've Come a Long Way!

The parable of the mustard seed may be a short story but growth the size of a tree takes much longer! Growing up in fact takes lots of time and patience whether we're a seed or a person. Sometimes, however it's easier said than remembered that neither we nor our faith suddenly matures overnight – especially when we feel as small as a mustard seed.

This week, help your little seedling(s) see growth really does happen even when we can't see or feel it by pointing out a skill they have been steadily growing into. Encourage them to see the big picture of their progress by drawing their attention to the beginning failures and fears and the continuing mastery and confidence. Then share the fact that our developmental progress is just like our faith – we may not always feel the God connection but it's inside of us growing as long as we stay focused on growth!

Grow Up!

We don't expect little seeds to do it on their own when we plant them in the ground. After all, everybody knows that little seeds can't grow up and become big plants unless they're properly fed and nourished. The same is true of our faith. Growing discipleship requires ongoing nourishment which is acquired from God through daily spiritual practices such as reading the Bible, worship and praise, prayer, and attending church.

Therefore, set aside some time throughout the week to help feed your child/children with a daily dose of the spiritual food their faith needs to grow and thrive. Start off little by reading a short Bible story or parable with child/children; if they are able to read, invite them to share some simple scripture with you. *The International Children's Bible (ICB)* (<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+4%3A30-32&version=ICB>) or picture Bible will help to make scripture more child friendly and accessible. Then ask one to two thought-provoking questions, such as *what does this Bible story/parable tell you about God and God's love for you, what does this Bible story tell you about your friendship with Jesus, and/or what does this Bible story tell you about you?* Questions that don't demand a factual answer will help your child/children dig deeper within themselves as they develop their own lifelong relationship with God.

Allow the chosen Bible story to inform the rest of the week's spiritual practices. For example, if using Mark 4:26-34, center your child/children's prayer and praise time on God and nature. A walk outside will help you both find countless reasons to worship, praise, and pray for.

Stirring Up Some Faith

It has been said that like a recipe, our faith also takes a lot of reliable ingredients. When we stir up a cup of God's Word, with a heap of prayer, praise, worship, patience, and time and put it in our hearts to bake, God's love can't help but grow within us.

So then why not get baking with your child/children this week? Following your family's favorite cupcake recipe (or letting Betty Crocker do all the work) makes for a great and yummy object lesson to get the conversation about faith baking going. Don't know where to start after the eggs and oil? No worries! UMC Discipleship Ministries has a wonderful and easy to follow lesson plan that helps put the faith and cake baking into perspective.

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/when-the-spirit-moves/third-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/third-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b-childrens-lessons> While the Church House Collection has two really cute and fun decorating ways to bring the message of the mustard seed home. Consider making a few batches with your child/children so that they can share their growing faith with someone in need of God's big love!

<https://www.churchhousecollection.com/the-parable-of-the-mustard-seed-cupcakes.php>

