

## *Mustard Weeds*

Time after Pentecost, Lectionary 11  
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Ezekiel 17:22-24; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17; Mark 4:26-34

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Carson Nicholas, son of Nick and Brenda Kaczmarek, received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism on the day this sermon was preached.*

Carson's mother, Brenda, asked me earlier this week for a few scripture passages that, as the years go by, she could read to Carson so he could learn more about Baptism and God's plans for this particular child. I shared with her some scripture to share with Carson, and I know she will, and I know Carson will ask questions, and in some stages, ask questions incessantly.

I also realize that Brenda and Nick will find other ways to teach Carson the Christian faith, about trusting our loving God, and following Jesus. That's plenty of teaching over plenty of years. Brenda and Nick—one way you will teach Carson those things is through stories. I loved reading to my children, and when I was a child, I loved being read to. Even older children love hearing stories. I know families in this congregation who enjoyed the Harry Potter series by reading it aloud together when a new volume came out. Of course, that's better than fighting over who gets to read it first!

Adults appreciate stories, too. How many of us have found that Becky Enney's children's stories explained a theological truth for our grown-up minds? That's been the case for years.

So no wonder the Lord Jesus himself knew that one prime way to reach people, to have them understand even a small point about the nature of God and the truth of God's kingdom, was to tell a story.

There are many familiar stories Jesus told—maybe we would even call them “famous” because non-Christians would probably recognize them, too: The Prodigal Son, who despite spending his inheritance, is welcomed back by his merciful father. The Good Samaritan, who though considered an outcast himself, does not return the disdain, but instead offers compassion to someone beaten up and left on the side of the road for dead. Those stories offer all kinds of opportunity for conversation about the love of God and loving our neighbor. I'm sure Carson, when he first hears them, will have much to think about.

So what are Brenda and Nick to do about the stories before us today? There's really not much to them—word-wise. Mark offers us two very small stories (or *parables*, as the Church has come to call all of the stories told by Jesus). These particular parables describe familiar, understandable images: Seeds sown, things growing, a contrast of tiny plantings and huge outcomes. Both stories begin with what appears to be a self-explanatory opening (“*The kingdom of God is as if... With what can we compare the kingdom of God?*”). We see that these parables

tell how the kingdom of God is like a farmer who sows seeds, then goes to sleep, and what he planted grows toward the harvest without him even knowing how. Or that the kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed you can hardly hold between your fingers, but it grows into a huge shrub. On the surface of it all, the stories seem deceptively simple: Trust that God's purposes are being worked out, even when we can't see it happening before us. Believe that God's kingdom is making its presence known—we just have to sow the seed and wait. Have faith that though God's kingdom is breaking into our world in small ways, God's intention is to usher in its fullness for us with all its love and peace and joy and life. Brenda and Nick—you can share those words with Carson as he grows. Tell Carson those stories. Let him know how great our God is, and what great a plan he has for his children.

But like most stories, Jesus' parables are not to be read only for what meanings seem to reside on the surface. Simple as the images are, brief as the stories may be, sometimes you need to read between the lines. So if we want to teach someone using the mustard seed parable, for example, we ourselves must read between the lines and think about what Jesus is telling us.

Maybe Carson would find it more interesting to consider that the shrub that grows from the tiny mustard seed is actually a garden pest. Yes, it was used for medicinal purposes, but most folks didn't feel the need to plant it. The mustard plant, to put it bluntly, is a weed. Why in the world didn't Jesus talk about grape vines here, or wheat stalks? After all, those were plantings people actually wanted in their gardens and vineyards and fields. Why in the world would Jesus tell a parable, likening the kingdom of God to the growth of a weed that most people wouldn't want around? Think sagebrush. Think Kudzu. Think crabgrass. Believe you me, this little nugget of information from Jesus' parable provides ample opportunity for conversation with Carson about the surprising ways of God.

Maybe the point isn't that the mustard seed is the smallest of seeds. Because it's not the smallest seed of all seeds. Maybe the point isn't that the mustard plant grows into the largest shrub imaginable. Because it really doesn't get that big. Maybe the point is that the mustard *weed* that most folks don't care for, don't want in their gardens, will grow readily by its own power, and will, in fact, eventually take over the garden. The kingdom of God can be compared to a mustard weed. Hmm..... The kingdom of God—or should I say, the rule and authority of God—is a power some people clearly don't want impacting their lives. For that authority of God commands you and me to forgive someone who has wronged us and work to reconcile with them, when we would much rather stew in our anger and walk away. That authority of God commands you and me to share what we have with those who lack, when we would much rather hoard the resources we have, telling ourselves we need it, and others will just somehow have to pick themselves up by their bootstraps and get their own. That authority of God proclaims that the path to real life is to be taken through the cross on which God's Son died, when we'd much rather not have to deal with that messy cross business, the notion that we, in our own baptism, die with Christ in order to be reborn in him. We just don't seem to understand that it is our old sinful selves that need to be weeded out of our lives!

We don't want the weed that insists upon forgiveness and mercy in the garden of our lives—we want it pulled out. We don't want the weed that insists we give away freely what we have so staunchly declared is ours alone—we want that weed pulled out. We conveniently forget that we

ourselves are in desperate need of weeding and pruning and tilling, so you and I might at last begin to bear good fruit that befits the kingdom of God. We keep thinking it's that ol' mustard weed that has to go!

But Jesus, in his parable, says the weed will grow, like crazy. It will push out the other things we and our world have been busy planting for centuries—the greed and selfishness and prejudice and hatred and violence and death that will have no part in God's kingdom. God's rule and power will make its presence known and felt. God's kingdom of love and compassion and abundant life will flourish. Often through us. And, thank God, quite often in spite of us.

Seems to me, this little story about the mustard seed...er, weed... could keep your conversations with Carson about God going for a good long time.

Best of all, Brenda and Nick, I think you and Carson can end up having a little inside joke. When Carson has those growth spurts that kids always have...when his shoe size changes in a matter of weeks... when his jeans become flood pants before they wear out out... and when someone then innocently says, "Carson, you're growing like a weed!" the three of you will smile at one another and be glad. You would have it no other way. **AMEN.**