

THE MUSTARD SEED

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Jesus also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

When Jesus talked about the kingdom of God in Mark 4, it never sounded too much like what we'd imagine a "kingdom" to be. The kingdom of God had nothing to do with wealth, or power, or conquering heroes; Jesus always compared his kingdom to normal, everyday things that were basic to human life. In the story of the mustard seed, Jesus describes a shrub that starts out as a tiny seed. When it grows up, it's taller than a horse and rider; its branches are large enough for birds to make nests in them, and find nourishment in the tiny seeds that grow there. The insignificant mustard seed has grown into a huge tree with birds in its branches. Amazing!

This parable has good things to say to each of us individually, and also to the Church. We can't allow ourselves to be depressed by small beginnings. We may want to be perfect overnight, but growth and transformation take time. We may do the same wrong things and mess up frequently and become discouraged at how slow our progress is; we may feel that who we are and how we serve God is no more important than a tiny mustard seed. But God knows better, and he's "growing" us in his time and in his way. He can do astonishing things when we're faithful in small things! Good example: SOMEBODY once led Billy Graham to the Lord. It may have seemed like a small thing at the time, but look what happened. The kingdom of heaven is built in our hearts and lives one branch at a time. But it keeps growing.

How many churches start out with ten members and grow bigger with time? Everything must have a beginning; nothing emerges full-grown. The Church began with Jesus Christ and the men he taught and lived with: the disciples were a small group of seemingly insignificant mustard seeds if I ever saw one. By the time the Holy Spirit was given in Acts 2, thousands more were added, and the Church has continued to grow ever since. Some of the most dramatic growth lately has been in Asian and African countries that we don't even hear much about. The Church, given life by the Spirit, will continue to grow until Jesus comes again.

We can see the growth of the kingdom of heaven in our own lives, and in the life of the Church. It may not always be dramatic, but there's no force on earth that can stop it.