

Today's Gospel lesson has the familiar story of the mustard seed. Jesus says "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, "he does not know how."

I really like this part: "he does not know how."

A farmer does not have to have a Ph.D in agriculture if his goal is just to be a good farmer.

What you need is commonsense, some knowledge, and willingness to work hard. But the most important thing is trust: you do everything you can, and let God take care of the rest; that's what you need.

I remember when we had our son twelve years ago at Pottsville Hospital in Pennsylvania; my wife really had a hard time in labor; I was there the whole time and didn't know what to do when the hardest moment came; there was the doctor and two nurses but I could see they were also scared; my wife screamed and cried when they couldn't get the baby out. Boy... it was just horrible!

Eventually, the moment was over and we had the baby... a few hours later, the doctor said to me, "Reverend, I have done this over thirty years. And every time I come here, I realized that this is not me but God doing all this; I am just here to help. I am not saying this because I am a Catholic. I just don't understand how people do this without believing in God."

That was one of the most powerful statements I ever heard.

Our topic today is about the kingdom of God. In Mark's Gospel, everyone is confused; they do not know who Jesus is; and even Jesus is described to have confused: at Mt. Gethsemane, Jesus says, "Father, remove this cup from me if you can." That means, he wasn't quite sure about who he was. And on the cross, says Jesus: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" meaning he was confused about what God was doing through him.

To Mark, this was an important point: now his church being under attack by the Roman Empire and fellow Jewish leaders, he knew everyone in his church was confused.

The kingdom of God they believed in seemed to be something they couldn't fully understand.

The bottom line: they did not know how the promise of God that had been given by Jesus would play out; they were just confused.

But here is the good news.

Mark's Gospel does not end with Jesus' body lying down in the tomb. He was not there; He was raised; the power of evil put him to death but the power of life raised him from the dead.

That does not mean people all understood.

Quite the opposite: the disciples were all afraid; they did not know how that could happen.

Some of us still do not know how this is still possible.

In life, it is natural that we have more questions than answers. When it comes to our faith, the same is true.

Faith is a mystery. Life is a mystery.

Those of you who went to college, what do you know?

Tell me how it works; tell me how the little tiny mustard seed can grow up and become the greatest of all shrubs, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade?

You may have wondered when you saw a weed growing through the tiniest of cracks even when its seed was covered by cement. Tell me how that happens.

It is a mystery. For me, this kind of story teaches how God rules on

the planet. There are so many things we don't know.

Don't try to explain it all because you read the bible.

My experience is that the more I read the Bible, the more questions I get to ask. That is normal.

But what the Bible is trying to teach is one thing: Trust the Lord.

Trust God. Trust the creator. God is not only the creator; he is also the gardener. Trust Him.

Even if we live in a small apartment, we have had several plants; but for some reason, they never last long; just recently, I killed two plants because I gave them too much fertilizer. And we still have a couple of them and they don't seem to grow well and fast enough; the reason is, I just found out, I gave them too much water.

Well, just like everything else, you need to know what you are doing.

God knows what He is doing.

God knows what we need.

He is the one who is in charge.

God is in charge; so let Him be in charge, not you.

When we say the "kingdom of God," the Greek word for kingdom is *basileia* which has two meanings: one is the **area** ruled by a king.

But the other meaning is the **power** or **authority** to "rule" as king.

Therefore, to be in the kingdom of God means being under the rule of God. We do not have to go to another world; we can be in his kingdom when we are in his presence here and now.

All you have to do is open your hearts and minds and put yourselves in the mystery of God; see what the love of God feels like; see what it is like when you are in God's presence.

I am just fascinated by the Old Testament story for today. Jesse, David's father, thought that God would choose the older son as Israel's king.

That is how we do in our culture; that's what the world wants; you have to have a certain look; you have to have certain experiences; you have to have certain things on your resume.

But this little boy David did not have all those; he just did not fit in! That's why he was left out in the field tending his father's sheep.

But God chose this little boy David.

The kingdom of God operates in a totally different way.

A little thing like a mustard seed is not a small thing.

The unqualified like little David is never unnoticed.

God does not look on our appearances but in our hearts.

We are all important to God; young or old; able or not-abled; poor or rich—it doesn't really matter. God calls each and every one of us to be people of his kingdom.

We are all called to be his mustard seed people: the people who have hope; the people who have dreams; the people who have this spirit to make a difference, not just in their own lives but in the world.

Life is challenging; the hardships we have are overwhelming. But we can't just sit in despair.

We are all God's mustard seed people.

Every plant is heading in one of two directions: either it is growing or it is dying.

So we have to move in one direction too.

"Mustard Seed People," 1 Samuel 16:6-13; Mark 4:26-34; 6/14/2009; Albany UMC

We are not alone.

God is with us.

With God's help, hopefully, we all can grow strongly into branches and bear fruits, the fruits of hope and love so that the world may become a different place, through us and because of us.

Amen.