

Title: Obtaining a Vision for the Kingdom of God

Sub-Title: The need for readjustment in our spiritual vision

Video URL: https://youtu.be/kfv-2_OyMTc

Our Gospel today ends with the statement, ***“he did not speak to them except in parables.”***¹ The original word for a parable derives from the root word *“bállō,”* which means to cast.”² Our English word “ball” comes from this word because a ball was something that you could throw. Through parables, Jesus was throwing something alongside our lives that we can playfully catch and consider. They were used as an extended metaphor or simile that made spiritual truths enjoyable and compelling.

Each of our assigned readings today have something of this quality about them.

Our Old Testament reading from Samuel depicts the calling of David, the youngest of eight boys in an extensive family. As each of his older brothers is presented to Samuel for a unique anointing, Jesse, David’s father, didn’t consider David important enough to be considered. Then as the older brothers are presented, the Lord speaks and says, ***“Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”***³ This story shows us that God sees what is not readily apparent to us, and he brings about his purposes from the most unlikely of people.

Our New Testament lesson builds on this theme by encouraging us to ***“walk by faith, not by sight.”***⁴ This is because external things, such as image, status, wealth, and relative success – are not the ultimate measure of who we are. Therefore Paul’s words are a call to readjust our vision so that we can see the way that God sees.

¹ Mark 4:34

² Strong’s Concordance, # 3850 (from [3844](#) /pará, "close beside, with" and [906](#) /bállō, "to cast")

³ 1 Samuel 16:7

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:7

As a modern-day example, I would like to cast another story into the mix. Back in 1990, when the now-famous Hubble telescope was first launched, there was not much hope for its success. Apparently, its reflecting mirror had been manufactured improperly, causing the telescope's pictures to be out of focus. In fact, Hubble needed a giant — and expensive — pair of eyeglasses to correct its vision because the curvature of its mirror was off by a mere one-fiftieth the width of a human hair. It seems that if the curve is not just right, a telescope cannot focus light and reflect reality clearly⁵, and it provides an illustration of how small things can and do make a big difference.

Parables are much like mental telescopes that allow us to refocus our vision so that we might see spiritual realities that would otherwise escape our attention and be impossible to perceive. The language of a parable is the language of faith — open to the unseen kingdom of God at work in our everyday lives. Yet, what is so unique about them is that they use ordinary and commonplace things, such as seeds and shrubs, to show us what God's reign in our lives resembles.

The mustard seed in our parable today was chosen because of its smallness and its relation to the greatness of the plant which unfolds from it. God's reign in our lives works in much the same way. It starts small, but its effect can be significant. When the seeds in today's Gospel account sprout and grow, the result is surprising.

When God began to work in my heart many years ago, I could never imagine that God could have a plan to use me. I had not only a speech impediment but also a learning disability. My first thought was, why, why Lord, do you want to use me? Yet his still small voice within me confirmed that it was true. I later discovered that the grace which was calling me had nothing to do with who I was but had everything to do with God's power at work within me. He even used things in my life which I once despised and things that caused great pain as instruments that would later be used for the display of his glory. Now, I can even

⁵ Illustration taken from *Sermons that Work*, 2006, by Frank Hegedus

boast with the Apostle Paul, “his grace is sufficient for (me), for (His) power is made perfect in weakness.”⁶

Few of us are great and mighty by the world’s standards. Not many of us will run for public office or be appointed to positions of prestige and power. Few of us will make it big on Wall Street or in Hollywood. Yet none of this matters in the life of the kingdom.

The parable of the mustard seed reminds us that our lives are more than the sum of days lived and dollars earned. Life has meaning beyond the walls of a home or our workplace. It has meaning beyond the borders of self-interest and inflated egos if we only will have eyes to see that God’s kingdom is within our reach. It is within reach because Jesus said, “*He that wants to be great, must be least of all and servant of all.*”⁷ Each one of us, if we are willing, can offer humble service.

David, in our Old Testament lesson, started by “keeping the sheep.”⁸ We, too, can play a part in doing little things that express care for God’s people. Small-town people and those who live in tight neighborhoods in urban areas understand the value of connectedness and community. With this mentality, we can take care of one another and build God’s church with acts of love.

Frederick Buechner said something that can encourage each of us in this regard. Comparing the world to a great spider web, Buechner wrote, “*If you touch it anywhere, you set the whole thing trembling.*”⁹ As we move around this world and act with kindness, we have no idea of the impact we can have, as one life impacts another until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place and time my touch will be felt.

Mother Teresa said it best when she said, “*I can do no great things, only small things with great love.*” The choice to live in the kingdom of God comes to each of us every hour of every day. Jesus said, “the kingdom of heaven has come near.”¹⁰ It is so near that it is

⁶ 2 Corinthians 12:9

⁷ Mark 9:25

⁸ 1 Samuel 16:11

⁹ Frederick Buechner, quote from “The Hungry Dark”

¹⁰ Matthew 4:17

within our grasp. So let us walk by faith, not by sight, with confidence that God is at work. And when we lose sight of the impact we can have, let us not forget our Lord's parables that were thrown alongside our lives for the purpose of restoring our vision and giving us hope. Hope that God has chosen us to bear fruit and make a difference, and they remind us that we are ***“heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ,”***¹¹ and by being united to him, we can bring glory to our God and Father in ways that we can never fully fathom. Amen.

Reflection Questions

- How might God be inviting us to “see” grace in circumstances, people, or events in the last places we would normally look?
- How is God stretching you to see in small things the potential of future growth towards greatness?
- What examples of “rags to riches” or “humble beginnings that turned into something greater than you could ever imagine” have you experienced in your own life?

¹¹ Romans 8:17