

**SMALL ACTS CAN MAKE A BIG SPLASH**  
***Faith in Action #3***

**LUKE 13:18-21**

Welcome again to Faith in Action! We're in week three of our all church emphasis which is helping us focus once again on being more outwardly focused, more people oriented and more compassion driven. I'll bet that most of us have heard the concepts we're looking at together somewhere before now, but it's worthwhile and important from time to time to be reminded of what we already know.

Now, this morning I want to start off with a quiz – a two part quiz. Here's the first part which has four questions. You just call out the answer if you think you know it. 1. Which country has the largest population? (China: 1.3 billion) 2. What's the world's tallest mountain? (Mt. Everest) 3. What type of tree is the tallest? (Redwood) 4. Who is the world's richest man? (Bill Gates). Good job! Now the second part of the quiz also has four questions. Let's see how you do. 1. Which country has the smallest population (Vatican City: 920) 2. What is the world's smallest mountain? (I'm not sure because no one's established when a hill becomes a mountain, but a couple of Internet sites point to Mount Wycheproof in the Mallee region of Victoria, Australia as the smallest mountain in the world. It stands 47m above the surrounding plain.) 3. What type of tree is shortest? (Dwarf willow: 5 centimeters when full grown) 4. What is the world's poorest man? (Jed Matthews: owes \$22.4 million and has no assets due to bad investments in an Internet company)

So, how'd you do? Better on the first half of the quiz than the second? The point is that we tend to recognize, respect and remember those things in life that are big while we tend to give little thought to the small things. In almost every aspect of our lives, we seem to believe "bigger is better." We bring that same perception into spiritual matters, don't we? We equate more people, more money, bigger ministries, bigger buildings, more programs and greater talent with greater effectiveness in God's work. How easy it is to assume that God is somehow doing more where there is something going on that looks grand and marvelous! And we tend to think just the opposite of smaller things. We assume that God isn't working or can't work through smaller churches and ministries, lesser talent and fewer programs. Let's face it: we think if it isn't big, God must not be in it. Not only do we think this about life in general as well as about churches and ministries, but we also tend to think it about ourselves. How easy it is to slip into the mindset that we aren't big enough, rich enough, talented enough, spiritual enough or important enough for God to use us in any meaningful way!

So here's a Bible fact you need to know or recall:

**SPIRITUALLY, BIGGER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER**

Is bigger always better? Not when it comes to spiritual things. You find that myth refuted in many places throughout the Bible, but let's look at just one place. It's something Jesus said. Jesus favorite theme was something He called "the Kingdom of God." No one had ever seen it. Jesus never defined it. He told stories and gave comparisons to help people understand and visualize what it was like. Here, Jesus says that God's working is like a mustard seed. It's a remarkably small seed – the smallest seed ever sown by a first century farmer in that part of the world. Because of its size the mustard see was used proverbially for anything that was very small and insignificant. For example, today you might say someone has a "pea brain." If you lived in Jesus' day, you might have said he or she had a "mustard seed brain." Now you would expect such a small seed to produce a small plant. Ironically, however, a mustard seed tree or bush can grow up to be 12 feet in height– the largest of the herbs grown in that area of the world. It's big enough for birds to nest in it.

In His second illustration, Jesus says that God's working is like yeast mixing with flour. As a boy, Jesus undoubtedly watched His mother make daily bread. She would have used yeast to make it rise, although she wouldn't use dry yeast like we do today. Instead, she'd keep a very small lump of dough taken from the previous day's making of bread. She'd take the lump of dough and knead it into the new flour mixture and eventually that yeast would permeate and influence the entire batch. But maybe the most important part of this illustration is the amount of flour into which this small amount of yeast was mixed. The amount can get lost in the translation from Greek into English. My translation says "a large amount" of flour, but the Greek is more specific and says three "satas." Three satas is about 50 pounds of flour. That will feed 100 people. Now that was far more dough needed for a family's daily bread! No housewife had an oven large enough to hold that much dough. So the vastness of the dimensions in Jesus' story reveals that He wasn't describing an ordinary baking situation. The point is that the original ball of yeast-permeated dough – small and insignificant in relation to 50 pounds of flour – had enormous influence nonetheless. So what's the point of these examples? Jesus' wasn't giving gardening or baking lessons! He was revealing an essential truth about the Kingdom of God which is:

### **GOD USES SMALL THINGS TO DO BIG STUFF**

That truth runs all through the Bible. When God wanted to create a people to call His own, He didn't start off with the residents of some esteemed city or even a large, well-established family. Instead, He used a nomadic man and woman too old to conceive children. They were Abraham and Sarah. When God wanted to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt, he used a disgraced man rejected by His own people who had spent most of his life leading sheep. That was Moses. When God wanted a king to lead His people, His choice wasn't the obvious one. He chose a shepherd boy named David. When Jesus wanted to feed 5,000 people, what did He use? A boy's sack lunch of a few fish and loaves of bread. When Jesus watched people putting in their offering at the Temple, He wasn't

impressed by the big donors, but by a few coins put in by a poor widow. And when God came to earth as a human being, He didn't choose a rich, famous family to be a part of. He was born into the poor and seemingly insignificant family of Mary and Joseph.

God uses small things to do big stuff! What you or others might see as too small or insignificant to matter, God seems as something He wants to use to accomplish His purpose. You might feel today that you're too small and insignificant to make any kind of spiritual impact or difference. Over the years, I've witnessed many followers of Jesus who've bought into that myth. The devil's convinced them they have nothing to contribute to the Kingdom of God. Nothing could be further from the truth! For me, a key scripture is what Paul said to the Jesus followers living in Corinth. "Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of 'the brightest and the best' among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these 'nobodies' to expose the hollow pretensions of the 'somebodies'? That makes it quite clear that none of you can get by with blowing your own horn before God." (1 Corinthians 1:27-29 MSG)

God uses small things to do big stuff! What is "ministry" after all? In Greek – the language the New Testament was written in – the word for ministry is "diakonia." The root word is "konis" which means "dust" or "grit." In other words, a lot of ministry is dirty work. The idea is that it involves rolling up your sleeves and doing things that look and seem unimportant to the world. The English word "ministry" is derived from the Latin root for "small things" as in the word "miniscule." Ministry is involved in small things. Much of ministry is involvement in little acts, small gestures and everyday service. Don't ever assume that the word "ministry" is restricted to what I do as your pastor or that you have to be on staff in a church or working for a mission organization to be involved in "ministry." Very few people have what you might call "big lives" – careers, jobs or places of service that make some huge, visible impact in the public arena. Your life and your ministry may seem to deal with such ordinary things that it's often difficult to grasp their lasting worth and eternal value. A follower of Jesus can either abandon or give less than a 100% effort to his or her ministry because it just doesn't look or feel successful enough. It's easy to let the size of what you do for Jesus lead you to get discouraged because it seems so small and insignificant.

Jesus' words about the mustard seed and the yeast underline God's clear design to use what looks small and insignificant to do what is spiritually large and important. Make sure you apply that principle to yourself! Here's another quiz:

1. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners.
2. Name the last five winners of the Miss American contest.
3. Name 10 people who have won the Nobel Prize.
4. Name the Academy Award winners for best actor and actress back in 1989 – 20 years ago. How'd you do? The point is simply that none of us remember the headliners of yesterday. All those people were high achievers – the best in their

fields. But the applause ends. Awards tarnish. Achievements get forgotten. Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

Here's another quiz. See how you do on this one. 1. Identify a teacher who impacted you positively on your educational journey. 2. Name a friend who helped you get through a very difficult time in your life. 3. Identify someone who met a critical need in your life at a critical time – financial, spiritual, relational. 4. Think of the person who was most influential in helping you become a follower of Jesus. The people who make a difference in your life aren't the ones with the most credentials, the most money or the most awards. Aren't they the ones who do the little things with a big heart? The video we watched a few minutes ago quoted one of Mother Teresa's great observations: "We can do no great things - only small things with great love." That leads me to close our time together with a question:

### **WHAT IF WE ALL DID SMALL THINGS?**

Or, to be a bit more pointed: What if we all did small things for God? God can take and multiply the influence of many people doing small things for His honor and glory. Don't wait for someone else to start it. Two weeks ago we discussed detours. When God presents you with a God-produced detour, take it. Run with it. See if it's a divine opportunity. Last week we talked about compassion. When God opens your eyes or adjusts your vision to see a person in need and gives you a way to respond compassionately, do it. There is incredible life-changing power when one person grabs hold of the fact that through Jesus Christ his or her life can make a difference. Your life touches another life. That person's life touches another life and on it goes.

Let me share with you a story about a small, poor, inner-city church that has made a difference when huge disasters hit far parts of the world. The church – New Mount Pilgrim Church - is located in the heart of Chicago's West Side where thousands of inner city families struggle daily just to make ends meet. It all began back on December 26, 2003 when an earthquake shattered the city of Bam in Iran destroying an estimated 80% of the city. Pastor Marshall Hatch knew his members would be wondering if there was some way they could help. They really wanted to respond precisely because Iran is a Muslim country. They wanted to demonstrate the love of Jesus to Muslims as well as other Christians. The church gave generously to the disaster relief effort in Iran, but - perhaps more significantly - Pastor Hatch was instrumental in helping to create Chicago's African-American Christian Relief Network, an alliance of small- to medium-sized inner-city churches dedicated to caring for those caught in natural disasters.

Exactly, one year later on December 26, 2004 the world woke up to the news of a tsunami that had devastated several Asian countries. By this time, Pastor Hatch had invited two other local African-American churches – Greater St. John Bible Church and New Landmark Missionary Baptist Church – to join his

congregation in responding to natural disasters. Together, these three middle- to low-income Christian groups reached deep into their pockets and raised \$8,000. They donated the money to the World Vision organization and its frontline efforts to care for Bam earthquake and tsunami survivors.

But the biggest gift was still to come. This little church relief network grew from three to thirty churches. When Hurricane Katrina ripped through the Gulf Coast nine months later on August 29, 2005, the network went right to work and raised more than \$50,000 to help survivors. And many of them went to the Gulf Coast as well. They took relief supplies and provided nurses and pastors so that they could have a ministry of presence among people in very desperate circumstances. They even brought seven pastors from the hurricane region where they had served back to Chicago for a few days of relaxation and recharging. These pastors had become exhausted from trying to address the overwhelming needs of those who were homeless or displaced. The pastors of these inner city churches say that the experience of giving to people in even greater need than their own people has deeply touched the members of their congregations. In the midst of their own poverty, they were willing to sacrifice. Chicago's African-American Christian Relief Network stands ready to make a difference when the next disaster strikes. As Pastor Marshall Hatch says, "Our people saw on TV what everyone else saw. But as Christians, we're going to show up."

By the same token, our church can truly make a difference in the Northland community in which God has placed us. As the old saying goes, we need "to bloom where God has planted us." God has planted us in the Northland community, so together let's find ways to meet needs in Jesus' Name and for His sake in the place God has put us. It's easy to look at the service projects that we'll go out and do two weeks from now on October 4 - Faith in Action Sunday - as kind of irrelevant and insignificant. "OK, Rick, so we go out and do stuff in the community for a couple of hours. Big deal! What good will that do?" Well, perhaps, only eternity will tell the whole story! Yes, at times, it may feel like our efforts are just a drop in the bucket: small, insignificant, unimportant, but that's precisely what we are: a single drop that joins with others to become a mighty river of God's grace and love. Small acts can make a big splash.

There's an old Gospel hymn that underlines the truth we're talking about today. The words go like this:

*In the harvest field now ripened, there's a work for all to do;  
Hark, the voice of God is calling, to the harvest calling you.  
Does the place you're called to labor seem so small and little known?  
It is great if God is in it, and He'll not forget His own.*

**Chorus:** *Little is much when God is in it, labor not for wealth or fame;  
There's a crown and you can win it, if you go in Jesus' name.*