



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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About These Things

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Mark 4:30-32

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

³⁰ He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² 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."

Romans 8:31-39

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,

nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

About These Things

Eugene Lang returned to the elementary school to be a commencement speaker where he had attended 53 years earlier. Lang was a successful businessman by that time, a man worth millions, but the neighborhood he'd grown up in had changed drastically. East Harlem's children were poor, and the drop-out rate for the community schools was among the highest in the nation. As Lang began the standard, graduation-day speech about working hard, studying, and going to college, he noticed that hardly anyone was paying attention. The kids were rolling their eyes, staring at the ceiling slouched low in their seats. So that's when he changed his speech.

"This is your first graduation – just the perfect time to dream," he said. "Dream of what you want to be, the kind of life you wish to build." The words were empty, no one really believing that these kids will make it. The statistics and the history, argued against his speech. But Lang continued. "Stay in school and I'll ... I will give each of you a college scholarship." After a second of stunned silence, a wave of emotional cheering and applause rolled over the room. It was the start of an amazing movement that has enabled unlikely students to attend college.

In that first year of the promise, Lang did more than guarantee the money for 61 fidgety sixth graders. He surrounded the students with support, resources, tutors, giving them the very best chance at making their way to – and through – college. To say the least, those sixth graders and their families were lifted up. The “I Have A Dream” Foundation has served 18,000 students and their families. What a difference it makes in one’s life when you know someone is for you. Get ready for some great good news: God is for you today!

This simple, yet poignant truth, anchors the writing of the Apostle Paul. He had written a long letter to the people of Rome, highlighting God’s response to sin and the meaning of grace, doctrine of predestination, and salvation. His stunning conclusion begins, What to say about these things – “If God is for us, who can be against us.” The Greek word for “if,” in this case, isn’t about the possibility of God’s love for us – it’s about the certainty of God’s love for each of us, found in Christ Jesus.

God’s love is not conditional on our circumstances. Your family may have turned their backs on you, your child may have disappointed you, your job may have disappeared into the thin air ... but the maker of the mountains is for you. The One who laid the floor of the oceans is for you. The One who scattered the more than 100 billion stars over galaxies, is for you! God is for you. Not was, not will be or might be, but is, right now. There is no waiting. God is the one cheering in the stands for you. I imagine God like the Australian

swim coach cheering at the Olympic games in an exuberant way. And if God is for us, who is against us!

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Paul personally and emphatically says in this letter to the Romans, no one and nothing: not even death or life, nothing present or the future can ever separate us from God's love. No wonder we love this message. Such sentiments are reassuring for all especially during times of much uncertainty and challenge. And yet, reading this iconic text in Romans 8 also stings in this season of upheaval. Our reality is that at times God does seem far away as we experience pain, separation and suffering which are realities in this world. The economic realities injure many, climate changes are frightening, cancer diagnosis and poverty, racial issues, with grieving close behind. Are these verses from Romans only nice words that help alleviate our stress for a moment or two? Or are they marching orders for us as we pray "thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven"?

Given the gift of God's abiding and constant love for us, the Lord summons us to be kingdom builders where this amazing love is extended to all. Where do we begin? Jesus' descriptions of the kingdom of heaven help us see the possibilities. Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast in bread or a mustard seed." Themes such as transformation, joyful surprise, extraordinary growth emerge from this image. When mustard seeds get planted the good, life-giving end does not come without energy, and patience. Anyone

who has ever planted anything will tell you that the soil is critical for growth. Our soil is the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, spurring us to new and strong growth. God is doing good, and we are gifted with the responsibility to participate in that good's emergence.

We begin with kingdom-of-heaven sensibilities. We align our sight with Jesus' vision. We sow the smallest of seeds – a call, a note, a conversation, a commitment, a donation, a prayer, a stand – and we scatter these seeds widely, generously, over, and over, and over again, individually and as a church. Eugene Levy began with one student, one family at a time to create a transformative movement. We trust that small gestures are fed by the spirit to grow until we see lives changed, communities impacted and the nations of the earth, cared for under the branches of God's tree of life. We can begin right here at Westminster Church with Deacon buckets and kits for the homeless, food for SHIM and sundae fellowship times to plant seeds of grace that will grow.

We are about daily cultivating a society that reflects the goodness of our God – sowing, until everyone knows that nothing can separate them from the love of God. Amen.



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