

FATHERS DAY THOUGHTS

United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT

June 16, 2024

Text: Mark 4:30-32

Welcome to Fathers Day here at our church! I'd like to begin by calling your attention to the way I am choosing to spell the "Fathers" of "Fathers Day." I am using "fathers" as a simple plural noun when the traditional way of marking "Fathers Day" is with a singular possessive. Please, nobody panic! I am not preaching on appropriate English grammar today! What I am doing is taking the notion of Fathers Day, just as I did with Mothers Day by the way and upending it just a tad. That's because I am all about celebrating these wonderful people in our lives, but not in a singular way. In other words, I am celebrating the vitally important ways in which the combined energy of these folks have, and continue to, influence our lives each day. In my mind this moves our recognition of this day into a whole new place. We can honor all men, those who are our fathers and our grandfathers, and those who have been like fathers in our lives. Hopefully you have been blessed by the presence of at least one of these men in your life. This morning, I hope we can learn a little more about them from you.

First, I'd like to just briefly take a look at this morning's scripture passage from the Gospels. This is the Lectionary text for today – well, part of it anyway -- and I think it's the perfect choice for this Fathers Day celebration. It's the parable of the mustard seed from the Gospel of Mark. How many of you know what this parable is about? It was a pretty popular one in Sunday School, once upon a time! Probably because it is so simple, especially as

Mark recalls it. Jesus uses the mustard seed, and the “bush” which grows from it as a parable for the kingdom of God. Okay, fine, we think. What does that mean, exactly? Jesus in his short time of walking this earth with us was trying to get people to understand two key things about God’s kingdom and people were really struggling to grasp what he was saying because it was so different from what people were used to thinking. We are still struggling to grasp his message in our own time for the same reason.

Here’s what this parable is intended to teach us:

- 1) The kingdom of God is not someplace else; it is right here and now. It is not an otherworldly realm. It’s not heaven as a reward for a righteous life lived here on earth. The kingdom of God – some call it the realm of God – is right here and now.
- 2) The kingdom of God is created here when we all live by Jesus’ simple summary of the Ten Commandments as he does in the “Great Commandment.” This is twofold – we are to love God with all that we are and all that we have, and we are to love the other as much, if not more, than we love ourselves.

Jesus would say that each of us is responsible to make the kingdom of God real for ourselves and the people we encounter every day. In other words, we are to live according to the great commandment always AND, when we do, the kingdom of God becomes real to others through us.

Of course, this is a monumental task for anyone, and we will always fall short because we are human. We lose our tempers. We take God’s name in vain. We don’t like certain people, maybe

we even hate them. We don't do everything we can to take care of God's Creation. We can be selfish and greedy, etc. etc. etc. This is where God's grace comes in and this is what Jesus is talking about with the whole mustard seed thing. He is saying here that if we have even a tiny bit of faith – the size of a mustard seed (which is super tiny) – we are empowered to do our part to make the kingdom of God real to others. And, that is how the kingdom of God grows here on earth, day after day, year after year. We grow it by living our faith into reality by loving God and loving others, even though we aren't very good at it because we are, after all, humans.

So where do fathers and the men who are like fathers to us fit into all this? Just where is the mustard seed connection in all this? And no, it is not because grilling out on Fathers Day is a tradition for many of us and mustard can be integral to that, depending on what you're grilling! Fathers, grandfathers, uncles, mentors, teachers, first bosses – all those marvelous men who have been like fathers to us – they are the embodiment of mustard seed love. What do I mean by that? A couple of things. First, if your dad or grandfathers were anything like my father, the words "I love you" did not come easily to them. Sometimes even words of praise were hard to come by from the generation of men who lived through two world wars and the great depression or those latter generations who were called to serve in Korea, Vietnam and then the Middle East. Even those who didn't serve learned the lesson of what it meant to be "the strong, silent type." My dad certainly fit that bill. Peter's dad too. But, that mustard seed love was still there, buried under all the layers of traditions of what it meant to be a man. Some of them eventually learned how to

reveal that love in brief flickers of smiles and winks and often times just being there. Some of them thought they were showing love by being real SOB's to their kids to "toughen them up." These men, these fathers and grandfathers, uncles and teachers and mentors and first bosses, I do believe most of them were doing the best they could. And, that dear ones, is a powerful lesson – a mustard seed love lesson that gifted many of us with such special men in our lives, imperfect as they might have been. Or, maybe your dad was a great dad! Maybe he was your little league or soccer coach. Maybe he was the one who helped you with all those science projects. Maybe he was the one who tucked you into bed at night and scared away the monsters. Or, maybe for some folks, that dad *was* the monster. Sadly, that can be true too. The thing is that all men, like all women, are in the final analysis, only human. If we have been very lucky, we have been blessed with dads who were amazing, kind and loving. Or we have had the gift of amazing teachers or that first boss who taught you what it meant to work hard and do your job the best you could.

And that dear ones, is what we're going to talk about together for a few minutes this morning. I promised you a guest speaker and – guess what – it's all of you! What I'd like you to do now is find one or two people to chat with. Move if you need to! Then, I want you to take two minutes and tell your conversation partners who the man is in your heart this Fathers Day and why he's there. Folks joining us on-line, you can type your comments into the comment section of this broadcast. Okay? Ready! Set! Chat!!!

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Thank you for that! Any burning insights from your conversations you'd like to share with all of us?

Now, off to the rest of Fathers Day! And DON'T hold the mustard! Amen!