

The parable of the mustard seed



Matthew 13:31–32

The Lord Jesus often drew on natural phenomena to explain God's works and ways. He taught the people by means of a parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field. It is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among the herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air lodge in the branches thereof."

This parable shows the Sunday-school children that that which might initially appear infinitely small can, through God's wisdom, grow into something great. Seed only grows because of the power which the Lord God has laid into it.

In the church services we hear God's word. It always draws our attention to seemingly small things, which have great significance for the future however. We are guided by the word awakened by the Holy Spirit, to prepare ourselves for the first resurrection.

The children marvel at the great promise of the Lord.

If we keep his word and act accordingly, we will be found worthy to enter the kingdom of heaven.

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Manuel lives in a warm country. He is sitting on the steps in front of the house and is peeling an orange. The segments taste both sweet and sour. He chews contentedly. Suddenly he bites into something hard. A pip! Contemptuously he spits it out. "Always these nasty pips," he grumbles to himself, "they're a real nuisance!" Unnoticed by Manuel, his father has come to stand in the doorway and has been watching his son eat the fruit. "Maybe we'll soon have an orange tree growing in front of our house," he remarks. Surprised, Manuel looks up and asks: "Why?" "Well, those pips are the seed of the oranges. Orange trees grow from them," his father explains. He then turns and goes back into the house.

An orange tree is growing a little distance from the house. Manuel does not think that it is a particularly beautiful tree. Still, he gets up and walks over to it. He puts his arms around its trunk. He has to lay his head right back into his neck to be able to see all the way up to its crown. When he sees the great expanse of dark green leaves interwoven with flecks of blue

sky above his head, he thinks of the orange pip. That trees grow from seeds is nothing new to him, but he has never given it much thought. For quite a while he remains standing there, just marvelling at the miracle of it all. Returning to the house, he picks up all the pips which he had spat out earlier. He goes into the kitchen to wash them and asks his father: "Do you think these will grow into trees?" "Yes, certainly, but it requires much patience and care." "I would like to grow them," says Manuel.

Together Manuel and his father plant the pips. The boy remarks: "It is really a miracle that something so great can grow out of something so small." Father nods and adds: "It is truly fantastic, isn't it? The dear Lord has really created everything marvellously. Just as a mighty tree grows from this little seed, so also the kingdom of God develops from small beginnings, thanks to God's grace." "How do you know that?" Manuel enquires. "Because the Lord Jesus told his disciples about this," his father replies. "He said to them that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which is sown on an acre. It is the smallest of all the grains of seed, yet when it is fully grown, it is a tree big enough for the

Jesus Christ is our teacher

birds to come and roost among its branches.”
“Mustard? I only know mustard which comes out of a tube.”
Father explains: “We are not talking about the paste you know. The parable refers to a special kind of mustard: black mustard. From one of its very tiny seeds a real tree develops—up to three metres high—in a matter of twelve months! Just imagine! The Lord Jesus told this parable so that he could explain and compare something visible with something invisible. That is why we call such stories parables. When you think of the little pips which we have just planted, it is difficult to believe that from such small, insignificant



things, enormous trees can grow. If people had to try and do something like that, they would never be successful. All we can do is take care of the plants. But for God nothing is impossible. Through his strength and blessing, something great can grow out of the tiniest thing.

God's Son came to the earth as a man. He was only one of many, many people who walked over the face of this earth. But his words came from his heavenly Father and have become known throughout the world. God has allowed something very great to develop out of it. Just think of all God's children across the globe. God also speaks to us today in the divine services. He wants us to listen very carefully as he wishes to prepare us for our future with him in the kingdom of glory.” Manuel nods his head and thinks: “That is very great indeed!” He then puts his flowerpots on the window sill.

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The Lord Jesus compared the development of the kingdom of heaven with the development of a mighty tree from a tiny grain of seed.

- 1 This story has as its basis a fruit well-known to the children: the orange. Ask them to draw the fruit and its seed in their book.**
- 2 We take some seed to Sunday-school. The children take a close look at them and try to guess what will grow out of them. They marvel at the power hidden in every seed.**
- 3 The children look at and describe the picture of the mustard tree. We draw their attention to the fruit and the birds. (The fruit contains new seed from which more trees can grow. The birds live in the protection of the tree's boughs and branches. They are happy there and when they sing it is as if they want to praise the Lord.)**
- 4 What does this parable teach us? The children try to explain the most important aspects in their own words. The teacher explains further:
The Holy Spirit shows us over and over again during the church services what is really important. A Priest stands at the altar and speaks. Nothing extraordinary, it seems. Yet he is proclaiming the word of God. If we recognize this, if we keep the word and act accordingly, we receive something which is of great significance for our future as children of God. These simple words can, thanks to the divine power inherent in them, help us to become worthy for the day of the first resurrection.**