

The Rev. T. Stewart Lucas
St. Margaret's Church
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Proper 6B

Well here we are back in the dog-days of summer this week. Hot and muggy with a 60% chance of afternoon thunderstorms. School is out and the kids have to be entertained because whenever any of us get bored, we get in trouble. Vacation cannot come soon enough and yet it is not long enough either.

And here we are again back in ordinary time, the longest season of the church year that begins after the joyful and dramatic feast of Pentecost. Our hangings are back to green. We stay in this season of ordinary time until Advent begins 24 Sundays from now.

Turns out that the majority of the days of our lives are ordinary - consisting of the regular schedules that require those small mundane tasks to be completed. We wake up at the same time every day, let the dog out, make the coffee, read the paper if it's still in business, shower and get dressed, fix the lunches, check the email, get to work, deal with the crisis of the day, check on your parents, encounter traffic on the way home and decide to order take out. Spend a few hours in front of the television and fall asleep and then do it all again. Day after day.

I doubt any of us will find the cure for cancer this week. Not likely that any of us will win the lottery or make a fortune tomorrow. Most of us won't be promoted or get a great new job this week. I haven't seen any of you winning American Idol or debuting on America's Next Top Model. None of us are competing for The Next Food Network Star. And yet as a community of believers we will indeed change the world this week. I promise.

You know, David was just a kid. It hadn't even crossed his father's mind that he could be a leader. He thought his skills were in tending the sheep, playing with his sling and writing and singing psalms to himself in the middle of the night. He was handsome, but a little skinny and his voice had not yet changed. He was hardly a replacement for Saul, the great and mighty warrior. And yet God chose him and Samuel anointed him to be King over God's people Israel.

"It was just like the God of Israel to do something so totally unanticipated. [God] had, after all, chosen to redeem the world through the as yet unborn descendants of a pair of skeptical senior citizens named Abram and Sara. When those descendants were enslaved and oppressed by the mightiest political, economic, and military power the world had known, [God] called upon a hot-headed, inarticulate fugitive named Moses to take up their cause and lead them to freedom. More than once [God] responded to their recurring disobedience and loss of faith with reassurance and forgiveness. Why should it surprise us to discover that when Israel demanded a king (so they could be like the other nations), God responded (after an initial false start) by choosing so improbable a candidate as David? It is, quite simply, the way the God of Israel and of Jesus works: divine power manifest in human weakness, divine purpose made present in the midst of human folly,"¹ in the midst of our ordinary small lives.

In this ordinary season of the church year we'll hear Jesus begin to teach his disciples through parables, these stories or analogies or metaphors that explain to us what the kingdom of heaven is like. It turns out that the reign of God is not going to come in as an overwhelming Roman imperial power. Instead, God is going to come quietly into this world, unassumingly, underwhelmingly. Today Jesus says the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.

It's easy enough to understand. This smallest of seeds encourages us as Zechariah said, not to despise the "day of small things." God's reign will begin with insignificance. What could be more insignificant than a peasant virgin girl bringing a baby into the world in a stable surrounded by animals? This Jesus, a peasant teacher from Galilee with a rag-tag group of followers who radically left everything they knew and all that they owned to follow him. Not a likely group to change the world. Not a likely crowd to show up and win a television reality competition. Not a likely party to be elected to congress. They were nothing, well, they were like a bag of mustard seeds.

But they did not remain the same. Those ordinary folk were nourished in the Word of God. They were sown into fertile soil and became the largest shrub in the garden.

"Big enough to offer shelter to birds. Hmmm. There's an irony here that we dare not overlook. God's reign begins in insignificance, like a little tiny seed, and then it develops, and it grows, and it matures, and it becomes ... a shrub. Just a shrub. Not a mighty oak, nor one of the famed Cedars of Lebanon, but a modest, unassuming, and most of all still insignificant shrub."ⁱⁱ

So now I'm going to tell you about our dog. Doug and I adopted a Bassett Hound over a year ago from a rescue organization. His name is Otis and he is perfect. And because we don't have children, Otis is spoiled. He eats the best food we can find. He won't go potty in the rain unless we hold a golf umbrella over him. And of course we do. He has all of the toys he could ever wish for. We buy him stuffed squirrels since he can't move fast enough to catch a real one in the back yard. He loves the squeaky toys especially. We buy him toys that move and talk and yet his favorite play toy is a black plastic flower pot. He chases that thing and chews on that thing for hours on end. And he loves stinky socks and the insoles of our shoes. He doesn't destroy them, he just plays with them. We give him all the great toys and spend lots of money on him, but in fact, he loves the simple things most. Lately he has an ice fetish. A simple cube of ice gives him great delight, especially if it comes out of a gin and tonic. He loves the simple things like taking a nap with us curled up on the couch or just laying out in the sun on the deck.

I guess Otis is like a child. You know the most memorable toys of our lives were not the expensive electronic games or the fancy remote-controlled cars or American Girl Dolls. In fact the best toys I remember were the refrigerator boxes that we found and transformed into skyscrapers. The little cootie-catchers my mother always made me out of the church bulletins on the back pew during boring sermons.

I don't think it's an accident that dog spelled backwards is God and that God came into the world as a small child. God wants nothing more than to just be in relationship with us through the little things. God takes the insignificant moments and gifts of our lives and uses them to change the world.

God works in our lives through the small things. And that my friends is how we will change the world this week - through the little things that we do for one another, for ourselves, for God, and for the world.

So for all of the little ordinary things: for flower pots and mustard seeds, for David and the disciples, for friends and family, for ice and the food on our tables, for children and animals, for St. Margaret's church and the work we are called to do, Thanks be to God. For the grace to accomplish the little things that will change the world, we beseech you O Lord. Amen.

ⁱ Joel Shuman. <http://ekkleziaproject.blogspot.com/2009/06/just-kid-just-seed-just-church.html>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.