

How does God work? Jesus gave an answer to that question. He said that God does not work as you and I do. Jesus sometimes described the way God works through parables, short stories about common things that make great truths clear.

Jesus gave one answer to the question of how God works in the parables in our Gospel lesson this morning. He talked about the kingdom of heaven, the realm where God rules and where God works. Let's hear one of those parables again.

“[T]he kingdom of God ... is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds-on-earth; 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.”

In this parable is a key to the way God works.

Jesus declares that God works through small things. He uses a simple and common seed. You can easily imagine him taking a little seed in his hand and saying, “Look at this little thing! See how small, and insignificant, and ordinary it is. But now look at that tree. I mean the one in whose branches the birds are resting. Can you believe it? That tree came from such a small seed as this! What

mighty size from such a small beginning. I tell you,” said Jesus, “this is the way God works.” God works through small things.

Well, I’m guessing that you and I seldom think that small things are important. We speak of this or that as being “bigger and better” and thereby reveal our belief that the two words always go together. If it is bigger it must necessarily be better. But size and significance are not always the same thing. The significance or value of something is not always found or reflected in its size.

Jesus says that God is unimpressed by bigness. God does not seem to trust bigness. In fact, God works through small things.

Think of Jesus’ own life. What a small seed God cast into the world to accomplish His purpose! Born in a stable. A member of a subjected people under the power of the mightiest Empire of the time. A carpenter for the first 30 years of his life. An itinerant preacher for 2 or 3 years. Nothing big or powerful evidently back of him at all: no political party, no army, no nation. Just 12 disciples, common people, mostly fishermen. One

betrayed him. One denied him. All deserted him when he needed them most. A disgraceful death on the Cross between 2 thieves. A borrowed grave.

When he came into the world, only a few noted his arrival. When he departed the world, hardly a ripple had been made. How odd of God to use such a small seed as Jesus Christ.

And when he left the world, there were only 11 shocked and dismayed disciples and a memory, because one disciple had hanged himself in shame. They had no publicity agents to advertise them, no public relations people to pave the way for them, no wealthy friends to underwrite their work, no political leaders to plead their cause, no books or newspapers to spread their word, no radio or television to reach the crowd.

But God took those 11 men 2,000 years ago and scattered them as seeds on the ground. Some 60 generations have passed, and that little handful of people grew to become 1/3 of the world's population, and upon His church the sun never sets. This is the way God

works.

How does God work in your life? Perhaps you have thought at times that God has forgotten you.

Nothing dramatic has happened. Unlike Moses, you never have heard God's voice speaking to you from a burning bush. Unlike Paul, you may never have been blinded by the light of God's presence—although something like that *has happened* to people.

Have you ever considered this: Perhaps you have been looking for God only in big things. Has it occurred to you that God may be working with you through small things day after day everyday? Someone once led you to a new understanding of love. Was this not God at work? Someone once showed you a life lived in faith. Wasn't that God at work? Someone once spoke a quiet word that stirred your conscience. Was that not God at work?

Perhaps you thought God would come to you in a great event. Perhaps some of you here would say that He has. More likely the Holy Spirit is working with you in the little episodes of everyday. Was it when you sat around a fireside and shared your thoughts with someone

who listened and cared?

Was it when the thing you dreaded came to pass, and you learned for the first time that there is a strength sufficient for the need?

Was it when someone demonstrated belief in you, just when you were so discouraged you almost had given up?

Then there is a second parable, which you haven't heard today. It comes from Matthew's Gospel (13:33).

"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with 3 measures of flour until all of it was leavened." God works not only through small things; God also works through silent forces.

You put yeast in dough and it causes the bread to rise. You can't hear it. It makes no booming noise. It works quietly. The dough is stubborn. It resists the yeast. But in the end, the silent forces win.

God is not noisy. God's work is not always heralded by a big bang. God's mightiest powers are silent powers. Jesus spoke of God's power as salt, light, leaven. No roll of thunder, no crash of cymbals, no 21-gun salute. Just a stubborn and silent force at work, the

gentle tip-toe of God in your life.

The stars do not make a noise, nor do the candles, and yet in them is light. Love is not “as sounding brass,” and yet in it is the hope of the world. The beat of the human heart does not deafen the ear, and yet within it is the power of life.

Against the tramp of Roman feet that shook the world, there was only a baby, the infant Jesus. Think of it, a mighty Empire pitted against a little infant. It was not the loudest noise that won. It was an infant.

You cannot trust the loudest noises in any age, for God works through the silent forces. 410 years after the birth of Christ, Rome, which became the center of Christianity, had been captured and burned by the army of the Goths, and all seemed lost. From his cell in the monastery at Bethlehem, St. Jerome lamented, “What is left if Rome perishes?” Something was left. Jerome went on translating the Bible into Latin. Outside the world was noisy with revolt. Inside that small cell, God was working through silent forces of His Word. From that cell emerged a new age.

So it is with God again and again. While Napoleon's armies were destroying Europe, Beethoven was writing his greatest music. During the awful bloodshed of the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale was elevating nursing to the highest level of human service. When it looked as though Christianity was coming to an end in England, John Wesley was speaking to the coal miners and beginning a religious resurgence that finally abolished the slave trade, reformed prisons and penal codes, put an end to the exploitation of children in the coal mines, and changed the whole tone of English life. Again and again, God's Will is accomplished in wondrous ways, as God works silently behind the headlines.

This is the way God works with your life. God does not break through with the sound of the trumpet or the roll of the drum. God does not hammer down the door.

God works through small things and silent forces.