

I understand President Ronald Reagan used to tell story about a very timid little man who ventured into a biker bar. The little man cleared his throat nervously and asked, "Which of you gentlemen owns a black Pit Bull which is chained outside to a parking meter?" A giant of a man, wearing biker gear, turned slowly on his stool, looked down at the quivering little man and snarled, "It's my dog. Why?"

"Well, sir," squeaked the little man, obviously very nervous, "I believe my dog just killed your Pit Bull."

"What?" roared the big man in disbelief. "What kind of dog do you have?" The little man answered nervously, "It's a small Pekinese." "That's ridiculous!" roared the biker, "How could your Pekinese kill my Pit Bull?"

The little man, swallowing hard, said, "It appears it got caught in his throat."

Our theme for the day is: THE POWER OF LITTLE THINGS.

Jesus once compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed. He called the mustard seed the tiniest seed on earth. But when the mustard see grows up, he added, it is taller than any of the other plants in the garden, with branches so large that the birds of the air can make their nests in its shade.

If Jesus were telling that parable today in our culture he might point to a giant Sequoia in California's Sequoia National Park. One such tree, the General Sherman, has been called the most massive living thing on planet Earth. The General Sherman stands nearly 275 feet tall with a girth of more than 102 feet near its base. It is estimated to weigh 2,756 tons. And yet the seed of the giant Sequoia is about the size of an oat flake. According to the Guinness Book of World Records a Sequoia seed weighs only 1/6,000 of an ounce. Talk about a mighty plant from a tiny seed.

Not having a giant Sequoia nearby, Jesus spoke of the tiny mustard seed.

On another occasion he used the tiny mustard seed in another context. He told his disciples that if they had as much faith as a grain of mustard seed, they could say to a sycamore tree, "Pluck yourself up by the roots and plant yourself in the sea and it would obey." (Luke 17:6) **Obviously there is more power to even a little bit of faith than you or I may have ever imagined. THE POWER OF LITTLE THINGS.**

It is interesting. **The gospel itself is a rather unique celebration of the seemingly SMALL AND INSIGNIFICANT.**

Bethlehem was a small town. Nazareth was too. Calvary was a tiny spot on the globe. There was nothing particularly significant about the profession of carpenter or fisherman or tax-collector. None of the disciples or even Jesus himself held positions of power and significance. The tiny mustard seed called the church that they planted 2,000 years ago showed little promise at the time, but today, of the 7½ billion people on earth, 1 out of 3 bear the name Christian.

Don't ignore the power of little things. Someone has said the sweetest music comes only from the smaller birds. As a matter of fact, the smaller birds are the only ones who really sing. You don't hear many beautiful notes from turkeys, or ostriches or eagles. But you do hear beautiful music from canaries, wrens and larks.

A man was packing a shipment of food contributed by a school for poor people in Appalachia. He was separating beans from powdered milk, and canned vegetables from canned meats.

Reaching into a box filled with various cans, he pulled out a little brown paper sack. Apparently one of the pupils had brought something different from the items on the suggested list. Out of the paper bag fell a peanut butter sandwich, an apple, and a cookie. Crayoned in large letters was a little girl's name, "Christy -- Room 104." **Evidently Christie had given up her lunch for some hungry person**

It was a small gesture, yet when word got around of that little girl's contribution, others were encouraged to also give. **One little lunch made a big difference. One little lunch touched lives.**

It's like a theory that Bible scholar William Barclay once proposed about how Jesus fed the 5,000. He said that most of the people going even on a short excursion would carry a small amount of food with them just in case they were delayed. This crowd stayed around for hours listening to Jesus teach. They were hungry. There was no way the disciples thought there could be enough food to feed such a mob. But there was a lad who had with him five small barley loaves and two small fish. It might have been a lunch his mother handed him to take with him when he began his journey. It was just a small amount of food really. But when he offered to share what he had, says Barclay, others did the same and before long the whole multitude was sharing the small amounts of food they had brought with them, and like a church fellowship supper, the food simply multiplied. **A little offered to Jesus goes a long way.**

The story is told that a sparrow once asked a wild dove, "Tell me the weight of a snowflake." **"Nothing more than nothing,"** the dove answered. "In that case, I must tell you a marvelous story," the sparrow said. "I sat on the branch of a fir tree, close to its trunk, when it began to snow--not heavily, not in a raging blizzard--no, just like in a dream, without a sound, and without any violence.

"Since I did not have anything better to do, I counted the snowflakes settling on the twigs and needles of my branch. Their number was exactly 3,741,952. When the 3,741,953rd snowflake dropped onto the branch, nothing more than nothing, as you say, the branch broke off.'

Having said that, the sparrow flew away. The dove, since Noah's time an authority on such matters, thought about the story for a while, and finally said to herself, "Perhaps only one person's voice is lacking for peace to come to the world."

Don't ignore the power of little things. Don't ignore the power of a solitary voice to change the world.

Robert P. Dugan, Jr. in his book *Winning the New Civil War* tells of hearing the mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina, address the final breakfast meeting of a seminar for Christian collegians. The mayor's comments were forceful and on target. Suddenly she shifted gears: "How many Polish people . . ." she began.

For a split-second Robert Dugan's mind raced. She wouldn't be about to tell an ethnic joke, would she? he thought. Of course not; she's not that kind of person, and besides, she's too intelligent to destroy her career with that kind of humor. Then he heard her complete the question: "How many Polish people does it take to turn the world around?" Pause. "One, if his name is Lech Walesa." "Ahhh!" writes Dugan. "What a beautiful twist. The frequently maligned Polish people got a magnificent compliment. One of their shipyard workers becomes an independent trade union leader whose courage and humble effectiveness results in his country's first free election in forty years and the installation of the first eastern bloc non-communist prime minister in decades. That one man helped change the course of Eastern European history."

Many of us may have already forgotten Walesa's contribution to the defeat of communism. But we should never lose sight of the ability of one committed individual to make a difference in the world.

Little things can make a big contribution to achieving a successful outcome in any undertaking.

There was an interesting story on the ESPN website about the late Hall of Fame basketball coach at UCLA, John Wooden. Some of you are probably aware that Wooden was a stickler for getting little things right. For example, according to this story, players gathering for the first day of basketball practice at UCLA were full of anticipation. They wondered how their coach, John Wooden, would set the tone for the long season to come. They didn't have to wait long to find out.

Veterans knew what was coming. But first year players were no doubt perplexed by the initial lesson imparted by their famous coach: He taught them how to put on a pair of socks. He did not teach this lesson only once, but before every game and practice. Why?

Wooden discovered many players didn't properly smooth out wrinkles in the socks around their heels and little toes. If left uncorrected, these wrinkles could cause blisters that could hamper their performance at crucial times during games. Many players thought the practice odd and laughed about it then. Wooden knew some of them laughed about it, but he would not compromise on this basic fundamental principle: "I stuck to it. I believed in that, and I insisted on it," he contended.

Wooden never left anything to chance. And neither should we.

Little things can make a big contribution to achieving a successful outcome in any undertaking.

Conversely, the neglect of little things can doom even the most ambitious undertaking. A tragic illustration of the crucial importance of little things was furnished a few years ago by the crash of a jet airliner shortly after takeoff. All ninety-five persons aboard were killed. An exhaustive study of the disaster concluded that it might have been caused by the loss of a little bolt, less than an inch long, in the rudder-control system. For want of a bolt, so many lives were lost.

We all remember when the space shuttle *Challenger* exploded. This tragic event occurred because a fifteen-cent rubber part did not function in unusually cold weather. Several brilliant scientists were killed and a multi-billion-dollar program was jeopardized because this one tiny detail was overlooked.

One little detail overlooked can make the difference in success and failure in almost any venture.

Michelangelo, one of the world's great artists, was also a great sculptor. One day a visitor was looking at a

Maybe you feel like a little thing, a trifle, a person of little consequence. I have some good news for you. Put your life in God's hands and you can do great things. Notice that when Jesus spoke of the mustard seed, he was explaining the kingdom of God. How does the kingdom come? One person at a time through people who are willing to give to God whatever small gift they might have. But here is the secret of the mustard seed: whatever you place in God's hands will be multiplied many times over. That truth has been revealed time and time again.

On May 12, 1807 a man named Robert Morrison boarded a ship in New York on his way to China where he would become the first Protestant missionary in that great land. After 113 days at sea, Morrison arrived in Macao, on the southern coast of China. Seven years later he baptized his first convert. He served for 27 years as a missionary in China, dying at the age of 52. It is said that on his voyage to China, when someone derisively asked if he expected to convert China, he replied, "No, but I expect God will."

When he finally baptized his first convert, he wrote these words in his journal: "May he be the first fruits of a great harvest, one of millions who shall come and be saved on the day of wrath to come."

God gave Robert Morrison faith to see beyond his meager beginning to a day when a vast multitude of Chinese would follow Christ. On that day no one would have believed it possible. You do the math. If it took seven years for the first convert, it would take seventy years for ten converts. It was a pipedream to talk of "millions" of Chinese coming to Christ. Morrison, like so many heroes of the faith, died without ever seeing his dream come true. At his death it would be fair to say that evangelical Christianity had established a tiny toehold along the coast of China . . . Today it is estimated that the church in China numbers 130 million. It's the most amazing story of church growth in the last 100 years. Today in China there are more Christians than members of the Communist Party. But it began with a few solitary missionaries like Robert Morrison who trusted their lives and their ministries to God.

Has God given you some gift you can place in His hands to watch God multiply that gift many times over? It may take some time. It took Robert Morrison 7 years to see his first convert. **That's the thing about seeds.** For some time, they may show no promise at all, but suddenly they start to sprout and, lo and behold, before long there is a giant Sequoia. God loves little things that He can use to His glory--little things like you and me. **LITTLE THINGS THAT CAN BECOME POWERFUL THINGS FOR GOD'S GLORY!! Amen.**