

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Background

Focus: the mustard seed and shrub (Matthew 24:32, Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:18-19)

This parable is found in all three synoptic gospels and in Thomas (Matthew 24:32, Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:18-19, Gospel of Thomas 20). The mustard in the parable is not the domestic mustard we use for flavoring. The mustard of the eastern world grew and spread quickly. Farmers did not like it because it could take over a field and ruin its useful production of grain. It is a shrub and not a tree.

Material

The gold box for The Parable of the Mustard Seed is on the New Testament shelves.

It contains:

- a yellow circular felt underlay
- a green felt shrub
- a small box containing 6 paper birds
- a small box containing 6 paper nests
- a small box containing imaginary mustard seeds

Movements

Words

Move slowly with deliberation to the shelf where the material waits. Pick up the box containing the materials and return to the circle.

Watch where I go to get this material.

Pick up the box and look at it more closely.

This box looks old. Parables are old. I wonder if there is a parable inside?

Trace the outline of the box.

The box is the color gold. Parables are valuable, maybe even more valuable than gold.

Knock on the lid, like knocking on a door.

Look. The box has a lid. I know, boxes have lids, but so do parables. Sometimes, even if you are ready, you cannot enter the parable. The lid is like a door. Sometimes it is closed. If that happens, don't be discouraged. Come back to the parable again and again. One day it will open for you.

Hold the box out like a present.

The box looks like a present. Parables are presents. They were given to you before you were born. Even if you do not know what a parable is, it has still been given to you.

Sit for a moment.

Move the box from in front of you to your side. Remove the lid and lean it on the box so the children won't be distracted by looking inside.

I know what let's do. Let's look inside to see if there really is a parable there. I know they are easy to break, so let's be careful.

Take out the yellow underlay and leave it for a moment folded up in front of you. Smooth it out as you talk.

I wonder what this could be?

I wonder if it could be a parable? It certainly is yellow.

Hold your hand a few inches above the underlay. Push your hand down into the "color" that is there, implying that the yellow has substance to it beyond the cloth. Invite the children to play with the idea of what the underlay could be.

There is nothing else here but yellow. I wonder what this could really be? Yes, I know, it does look like a lemon.

I know, it could be the sun. I wonder what else it could really be?

Take out the rolled up green felt shrub and hide it inside your closed hand. While you are hiding it, keep eye contact with the children so they will look at you rather than at the material.

A lemon drop? I wonder.

Look carefully into the box. There is nothing there to help you get ready. The pieces left all have to do with the telling of the parable.

Let's see if there is anything else in here that can help us get ready.

Oh no, there isn't anything else! All we can do is begin.

There was once someone who said such wonderful things and did such amazing things that people followed him. As they followed him, they heard him speaking about a kingdom, but not like the kingdom they lived in. It was not even like any imaginary kingdom anyone had ever heard of.

They couldn't help it. They had to ask him. What is the kingdom of heaven like? One time when they asked him, he said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed...

Take out the box of imaginary mustard seeds.

Open the box and pick up an imaginary seed on your finger. Show it to the children.

Push your finger into the underlay just in front of the children as if you are planting a seed.

Place the rolled-up green felt shrub over where you planted the seed and gradually unroll it as the shrub grows.

Take the box of birds out of the parable box. Take the birds out one at a time and place them on the underlay flying toward the shrub.

Take the box of nests out of the parable box. Take the nests out one at a time and place them on the branches of the shrub.

Sit back and enjoy the birds and the shrub. If the children are settled, you might pass around the boxes of birds and nests and invite the children to place the birds and nests in the story.

... the tiniest of all seeds, a seed so small that if I had one on my finger you would not be able to see it.

A person put the seed in the ground.

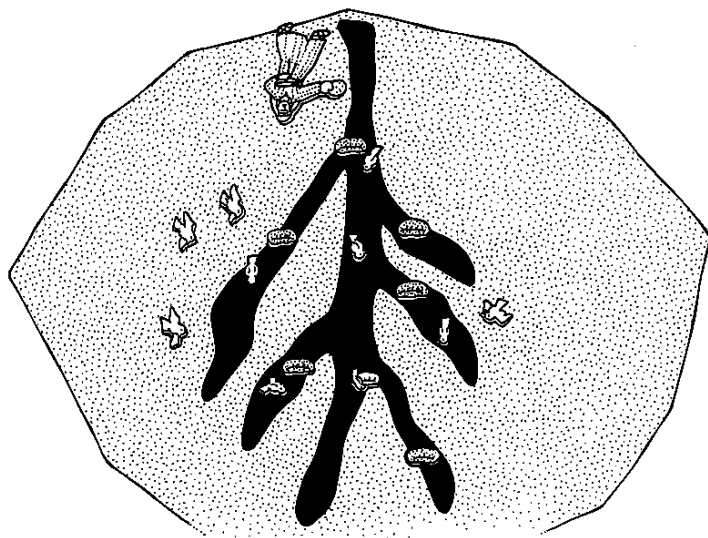
And it began to grow...

... and grow...

... and grow.

The little seed grew up so big that it was like a tree, and the birds of the air came...

... and they made their nests there."



THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED (STORYTELLER'S PERSPECTIVE)

When you are finished with the birds and the nests, it is time to begin the wondering.

- I wonder if the person who put the tiny seed in the ground has a name?
- I wonder if the person was happy to see the birds coming?
- I wonder what the person was doing while the shrub was growing?
- I wonder if the person could take the shrub like a tree and push it all back down inside the tiny seed?
- I wonder if the seed was happy while it was growing?
- I wonder if the birds have names?
- I wonder if they were happy to find the tree?
- I wonder what the tree could really be?
- I wonder if you have ever come close to this kind of tree?
- I wonder what the nests could really be?
- I wonder where this whole place could really be?

When the wondering draws to a close, place the birds and nests back into their boxes and then put the rest of the objects into the parable box. The underlay goes in last.

Take the parable box back to its shelf and return to the circle. Help the children decide what work they will get out.

Jerome W. Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play Volume 3: 20 Presentations for Winter* (2002), pp. 115-120.