

“LITTLE THINGS MEAN A LOT”

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Father’s Day

Mark 4:26-34

Back in the year 1953, a woman named Edith Lindeman and a man named Carl Stutz wrote a song called “Little Things Mean a Lot.” Lindeman wrote the words and Stutz wrote the music. It was a wonderful song whose words went like this:

Blow me a kiss from across the room,  
say I look nice when I’m not.  
Touch my hair as you pass my chair,  
little things mean a lot.

Give me your arm as we cross the street,  
call me at six on the dot.  
A line a day when you’re far away,  
little things mean a lot.

Don’t have to buy me diamonds or pearls  
champagne, sables and such.  
I never cared much for diamonds or pearls  
‘Cause honestly, honey, they just cost money.

Give me a hand when I’ve lost my way,  
give me your shoulder to cry on.  
Whether the day is bright or gray,  
give me your heart to rely on.

Send me the warmth of a secret smile,  
to show me you haven’t forgot.  
For now and forever, that’s always and ever,  
honey, little things mean a lot.

Some of you here might remember that song, and I’ll bet some of you could even sing it for us. It’s a wonderful reminder that little things do mean an awful thought - sometimes we forget that.

One couple found out the hard way just how true that statement is. They

were getting married, and they went to the baker to order their wedding cake. They were committed Christians, and so they wanted a Bible verse written on their cake - from I John, chapter 4, verse 18, which reads, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear."

Well, something happened in the bakery, because on the day of the wedding when it arrived at the reception site, the couple was horrified to learn that somehow a little detail, the Roman numeral one had been left off of the book of the Bible, so instead of it being from I John, it was from the gospel of John, and this is what John 4, verse 18 says, "For you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband!"

(Brian Bauknight, *Devotions to Leave You Smiling*, p. 31)

Oh, my, little things do mean an awful lot. Jesus knew that, and the writer of the Gospel of Mark who wrote down Jesus' words, knew that as well. And he knew, in particular, that his readers really needed to remember that.

Just to remind you, Mark's Gospel was written about 70 AD, and was written at a time of intense persecution of the early church. It was around the time that the temple was destroyed by the Romans, and the early Christians were being attacked from all sides. They felt overwhelmed, and probably felt that their efforts to spread the Gospel and grow the church were paltry, at best, and perhaps, even futile.

Mark writes, in part, to build them up, encourage them, spur them on. And in this part of his gospel, he does that by reminding them that, little things mean a lot. He shares Jesus' words about little things like a grain of mustard seed, which starts out oh so small, but grows into something big. He wants them to remember that if they but offer what they have, small though they consider it, God will use it to make it enough, and more than enough.

In the face of those overwhelming problems, the enormity of forces trying to eliminate them, these words were a lifeline for the early Christians. They were something to hang onto, to trust, to be inspired by, and by which they were compelled to do what they could, and let God do the rest. In the face of overwhelming problems, these words of Jesus about little things were their saving grace.

My friends, so too are they for us in the midst of the overwhelming issues of our age. The forces at work in our world are somewhat different than they were for the early church, although, truth be told, there are an awful lot of things, people, and forces that work against the church.

Put on top of that other deep problems of our day - world problems, war problems, economic problems, unemployment problems, family problems, personal

problems - it can be a bit overwhelming, and in recent times, it has been for a lot of people. The problems are so overwhelming at times, that we start to think nothing can be done - things will just be what they will be - there's nothing we can do, and certainly nothing a person can do on his/her own.

Well, friends, Jesus would say that nothing could be further from the truth. "Do the little things," He would say. "Do what you can. Make your mark. Offer what you have, however you can, and leave the rest up to me."

Do you realize how much time Jesus spends talking about little things, small things? Think about it - remember when, after He addressed all the people on the mountainside and they needed to be fed, He turned to a small boy and used the small amount of food he had - two small fish and some loaves of bread - to feed the entire crowd? And remember how He lifted up the widow and her small offering as an example of generous giving? And remember how He described the love of God as being like a woman who searched and searched and searched for one small lost coin, or how He talked about searching and searching and searching for one little, lost sheep? Jesus talked a lot about the small things of life, and how important they are in the scheme of things.

It's because He knew that it's small things that lead to big changes. The people of the early church kept doing their thing, kept spreading the word to others one by one, and it clearly brought about something big, because over two thousand years later we're still here in this place worshiping the same Lord and Savior!

Why, we've seen in this very church the power of a whole lot of people doing their small thing, and something big happens - we've seen it over and over again. In the choir, one voice joins with another voice who joins with another voice, and soon, they offer beautiful music which lifts us up and inspires us.

In Sunday School, two adults who maybe weren't really sure they had what it took to teach children, nevertheless said yes, offering their small gift, and they spend a year inspiring students to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. There were people like that in this church in the early 60's who did that, and I was one of their students, and now look where I am. Little things mean a lot!

Over and over again, in this church, all of us have been given the opportunity to give what we can, even if we think it's a small amount, and together, God has made it into big things - like money to build an addition, and \$11,000 for the One Great Hour of Sharing, and care packages for our college students - and I could go on and on. But it's because of the power of all the little things we offer put together, and God making them enough and more than enough!

You see, that's what Jesus was saying that day. A grain of mustard seed seems so small and inconsequential. It's hard to imagine by looking at it that much could come from it, and yet, enormous, wonderful things do come from that little seed, because God is in the process.

And so it is for us. God takes what we give, however small, and provides the growth, and wonderful things happen. Oh, that we would remember that, but too often we don't. We lament that we don't have more to give, that we don't have enough, or that the problems are too big to tackle. We don't think we can make a difference, we are unsure of ourselves, insecure. We, too often, buy into the world's way of thinking - negative, doubting, overwhelming.

I read something very touching this week that the late, wonderful Mr. Rogers wrote. I don't know if you know that Mr. Rogers was not only a wonderful childrens' television personality, but he was also an ordained Presbyterian minister. Well, one summer, when he was halfway through his seminary studies, he had a weekend off and went to visit a little New England town. He saw a little chapel there, and on Sunday he went to the worship service.

He said, in his own words, that he heard the worst sermon he could have ever imagined. He said, "I sat in the pew thinking, 'He's going against every rule they're teaching us about preaching. What a waste of time!'"

Then, he continued, "That's what I thought until the very end of the sermon when I happened to see the person beside me with tears in her eyes whispering, 'He said exactly what I needed to hear today.' It was then that I knew (Rogers said) that something very important had happened in that service. The woman beside me had come in need. Somehow the words of that poorly crafted sermon had been translated into a message that spoke to her heart."

(Fred Rogers, *The World According to Mister Rogers*, p. 126)

That pastor may not have been the world's greatest preacher, but that day he offered what he had, and the Lord made it enough, more than enough for that woman!

Little things mean a lot. Like that grain of mustard seed that grows into a big, huge bush where birds nest and find rest. Little things mean a lot. When we offer the little things, even in the face of overwhelming odds, God will use them and make them enough, and more than enough.

So I want to close with a couple of "seed stories," in the hopes that they will inspire you to give of what you have, however small you think it is, trusting God to make it enough.

The first is a story told by a preacher named Martha Sterne. She tells about how her child wanted to go to school in New York City and how she was scared to death for him. All she knew about New York was that it was congested, and crime ridden, and a scary place. She feared for her son's life.

But after he got there, she made some interesting discoveries. She discovered that in the late 90's, things had begun to change in New York City. Instead of tackling the huge problems the city was facing, the administration began to deal with small things - like cleaning up graffiti, targeting specific dangerous street corners, putting more cops on the streets walking beats, getting rid of garbage piles, going after jaywalkers, things like that. Nothing huge, but over time those small changes made a difference. People began to see things getting better, and they, in turn, began to have a sense of pride about their city, and began to do even more to make it better - and lo and behold, crime rates began to drop, and life in the city got better.

It wasn't some big, huge policy that caused change to happen, it was the power of little things adding up that did it. Little things mean a lot.

Now, it a much, much different vein, I want to tell you about something little I witnessed with my own eyes. Most weeks, when things aren't crazy around here, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, I head over to the County Building in the late afternoon to go to the Fitness Center (along with a lot of other people from this church, I might add!) I usually drive the same route every time. And that route takes me through a neighborhood.

Almost every time I take that route, I see something really wonderful. It's a father playing outside with his daughter - sometimes basketball, sometimes throwing a baseball. He's clearly just come home from work - but there he is, playing with his daughter.

It touches my heart every time I see it. Why? Well, for a number of reasons. One, there is nobody else playing outside anywhere around - it's not like when we were kids and everybody played outside - too many are inside in front of computers and televisions these days. So that's one reason it touches me.

But more than that, it touches me because that father spending time with his daughter is something she will never forget. She will never forget that, even if he was tired and could be inside sitting reading a newspaper or watching Sports Center, instead he's outside spending time only with her. She will never forget that he cares that much about her.

And hopefully, when she's grown, she'll share that kind of love with her own children. Playing outside for an hour after work may not seem like much, but like

that grain of mustard seed, it's the start of something big.

Little things mean a lot, my friends. Jesus told us that in his own wonderful way that day so long ago. God takes what is small and makes it mighty. Didn't He do that in a most magnificent way, by the way, when He sent our Savior into the world as a little, tiny baby? That little tiny baby turned the world upside down, and changed life forever. That little tiny baby was and is the source of life for you and me - real, true, abundant, eternal life.

So go forth from this place to offer what you have, however little you deem it to be, because God will take what you give, and make it more than enough. May it be so.

Amen.