

Ordinary 16A - 2020

A man named Tom Stonehill was speeding through a small town one night looking for a public restroom. Finally, he came to a funeral home. Tom used the facilities, then paid his respects to the deceased. The funeral director, spotting Tom, insisted that he sign the guest register. Tom thought it was a lot of trouble to go through just to use the bathroom, but he did it anyway. A few weeks later, Tom got a call from a lawyer in this small town. It turns out that Tom had visited the funeral home on the night that the town's richest citizen was being laid to rest. The rich man had no family or friends. In his will, this man had stipulated that whoever came to his funeral would inherit his fortune. Tom's was the only name in the guest register that night, so he received the full inheritance. [Yitta Halberstam and Judith Leventhal, *Small Miracles* (Holbrook, Mass.: Adams Media Corporation, 1997), pp. 57-60]

Such is the effect of small things. Today's readings speak of small things and how often they bring forth great results. These parables are a take-off on the power of the seed that we saw last week. What may seem to us a small thing in the everyday world can be a big thing in the spiritual world.

It was the last day of high school. The yearbooks had been distributed and all the seniors were scurrying around to get the signatures of their friends, classmates and teachers.

Sharon's book was signed by all of her friends and she had signed their books. But there was one signature Sharon wanted most of all and saved that person for last: Miss Simmonds, her favorite teacher, who taught English. Miss Simmonds was a dedicated, devoted and demanding teacher. As far as anyone knew, she wasn't married, and she didn't have any children. Sharon wanted to be a teacher just like Miss Simmonds. In the fall, she would be going to college to major in English. Sharon was sure Miss Simmonds knew how much she admired and respected her, but wasn't quite sure what her teacher thought of her ... until she read her yearbook. At home after supper that evening, Sharon went to her room, closed her door and sat on her bed to read what everyone had written in her yearbook. When she got to the page of the English department, she read the following in Miss Simmonds' familiar handwriting: "Sharon, if I had a daughter, I'd want her to be just like you."

Miss Simmonds wrote those words 35 years ago. Since then Sharon must have taken out her yearbook hundreds of times to read those words. For Sharon, they were the most encouraging words in the world.

For more than three decades, Sharon has been a high school teacher, and she looks forward to that day every June when seniors receive their yearbooks and are scurrying around getting signatures. As long as Sharon is a teacher, there will always be one senior at her school who will find these words written in her yearbook: If I had a daughter, I'd want her to be just like you. [Dr. Rob Gilbert, "The yearbook," *Connections*, 16 Sunday of the year, July 21, 2002, (MediaWorks, 7 Lantern Lane, Londonderry, N.H. 03053-3905)]

Jesus speaks in the gospel of how a mustard, one of the smallest of seeds, grows up to be such a large shrub that the birds of the air come to nest in it. He speaks of how yeast, a very small piece of leaven, can affect a mass of dough, lifting it into the large loaf of bread that comes out of the oven. "The Parable of the Leaven is out-and-out humor. We usually miss the joke because we do not understand that three measures of leaven amounts to fifty pounds! To imagine a Galilean peasant woman leavening so much would easily convey the surprise and overwhelming joy that Jesus suggests is characteristic of the Kingdom." ["Scriptural commentary," *Good News* 29 (7): 257 (Good News, Liturgical Publications Inc., 2875 South James Drive, New Berlin, WI 53151) July 2002]

When my son, Mark, was in the third grade he saved all his allowance for over two months to buy holiday presents for those he loved. He had saved twenty dollars. The third Saturday in December Mark announced that he had made his list and had his money in his pocket. I drove him to a local drug store, the modern version of what we used to call the "Five and Dime." Mark picked up a hand basket and went off on his own while I waited patiently reading a book at the front of the store.

It took Mark over 45 minutes to pick out his presents. The smile on his face as he approached the checkout counter was truly joyful. The clerk rang up his purchases as I politely looked the other way. Mark kept within his budget and reached into his pocket for his money. It was not there. There was a hole in his pocket, but no money. Mark stood in the middle of the store holding his basket, tears rolling down his cheeks. His whole body was shaking with his sobs.

Then an amazing thing happened. A customer in the store came up to Mark. She knelt down to his level and took him in her arms and said, "You would do me the greatest favor if you let me replace your money. It would be the most wonderful present you could ever give me. I only ask that one day, you pass it on. One day, when you are grown, I would like you to find someone you can help. When you do help this other person, I know you will feel as good about it as I do now."

Mark took the money, tried to dry his tears and ran to the checkout counter as fast as he could go. I think we all enjoyed our gifts that year almost as much as Mark enjoyed giving them to us. I would like to say "thank you" to that incredible woman. I would like to tell her that four years later Mark went house to house collecting blankets and coats for the people in the Oakland fire--and he thought of her. I would like to tell her every time I give food to a homeless family, I think of her. And I want to promise her that Mark will never forget to keep passing it on. [*A Touch of Lemon*, copyright 1998 by Rick Phillips. Reprinted in [*A Sixth Bowl of Chicken Soup for the Soul*](#), copyright 1999 by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen. Health Communications, Inc., Deerfield Beach, FL. Used with the author's permission]