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Matthew 13:31-32 – mustard seed

Mark 11:23 – mountain

Love 301: “What Are We to Do: Small Gestures and Faith Needed Actions”

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Size, it's a tricky thing. Sometimes we see small as good, like when it comes to our clothing size. Yet, we also view small as being somewhat insignificant and inconsequential. And we also have a love-hate relationship with the size big. We buy the big bag of potato chips, but would rather not make a big mistake. Our relationship to and attitude about small and big could determine the quality of our life, as well as the lives of others.

In his memoirs, Oscar Wilde recalled the experience of being brought from the prison, where he was held after being declared (in the strange manner of his day) – “guilty” of homosexuality. He writes, “When I was brought down from my prison between two policemen, a man I know waited in the long dreary corridor so that, before the whole crowd, whom an action so sweet and simple hushed into silence, he might gravely raise his hat to me as, handcuffed and with bowed head, I passed him by. Men had gone to heaven for smaller things than that.”

After Episcopal Archbishop Desmond Tutu won a Nobel Peace Prize for his nonviolent struggle against apartheid in South Africa, he was asked to recall the formative experiences of his life. He replied, “One incident comes to mind immediately. When I was a young child I saw a man tip his hat to a black woman. Please understand that such a gesture is completely

unheard of in my country. The white man was an Episcopal bishop and the black woman was my mother.”

These two stories demonstrate for us, that even a small, fragile gesture can take on grand dimensions when it is offered in love which shows itself via respect.

When I think about small gestures and how they make a difference, I realize that in my own life they have not only been a little action someone did towards me that had great impact, but I can also think of how a few words made a huge difference in my life.

I remember in an art workshop about five years ago, feeling terribly insecure about my ability (or lack thereof) and thinking everyone else knows what to do, but me. I was working on a piece and it seemed like the decision for the medium to be used should either be watercolor or pastels. I asked the workshop leader watercolor or pastel. She looked at me with great respect and said, “What do you think?” I said “I will test them both out and see what I like best”. She just smiled.

Small gestures that make a difference are about us really seeing others. Taking the time to connect, relate, and all the while showing deep respect. Whether the incident occurred in a London prison in 1895 or in South Africa in the 1920’s or in Wallingford Pennsylvania in 2014, small gestures change our world, and then go on to change the world around us.

In a world where concentration is replaced by a passing glance or a quick push button response or a listening while still moving, we need more than ever, people who will stop, look, listen, and thoughtfully respond.

If you ask most people they feel really seen by only a few people, but most don't know them, nor do they really care how they are doing. Most of our relationships don't go past social niceties that are only on the surface and maybe aren't a bit further than skin deep.

God knew humans could be like that, and thus gave us directives to see, connect, and show respect. We are told over and over again in holy writ, to be kind, tenderhearted, thoughtful, and to show others respect for all are made in the very image of God and they are nothing less than holy.

Irish novelist and Anglican clergyman Laurence Sterne wrote, "Respect for ourselves guides our morals; respect for others guides our manners.

What can even a small gesture of respect do for someone else? It can free them to fly. Society and our families of origin can leave us with some baggage to carry around. Respect from someone else allows us to get on a plane with merely a carry on bag and thus not needing to check our bag. To have someone respect you sends you out of the gate, onto the tarmac, where there is an air traffic controller letting you know you are clear for takeoff.

Respect shown to Wilde, Mandela and Lampman changed us forever, and by so doing, all three of us were ready to fly to new heights, where before we had been grounded due to the exterior weather. Someone showing us respect allows us to move from windy, white out conditions on the outside to interior sun and clear skies. Just the weather needed for a successful takeoff.

We belittle the small things as unimportant and we avoid the big things because we think they are beyond our reach, and they are! Some of us never move beyond what we think is doable.

Jesus spoke over and over again about doing beyond what we think we can do. And the truth is there are some things beyond our limits, and that is when it is important to remember that what is often beyond our limits is not beyond what God can do.

In my 34 years of ministry, I have seen many of church living below their limits, and hardly any living at what God could help them do. Churches feel best to play it safe. Now, what I am not saying is we or any other church should just disengage our brain and do something wild and crazy without checking things out first.

Matter of fact, what I am saying is we should be at the place where we do our legwork and find things out - like we have done in our planning process, and I am at the same time saying we should go beyond our limited to the point of faith when it comes to taking our next actions as a church. Many churches are only doing what is in their own power to do. That is a club, that is a business, that is a sports team. What I am talking about here is dreaming big enough that it will require God's help to complete. If not, we are dreaming too small.

Jesus himself said, Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even great things than these... (John 14:12). Not just the same, greater; yes, even greater.

If we can envision it and assess we can do it, then it isn't faith. Faith is not just the assurance of things hoped for, it is also the certainty of what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1).

Instead of saying to the mountain "move" we are saying, "I have checked the trail out, we can't hike it." Instead of saying to the mountain "move, we say, "I am too tired to do the heavy lifting that will require." Instead of saying to the mountain, "You gotta go." We say, must be there because God put it there. And besides that, we don't have the money we'll need to move it. And Jesus said, "You will do greater work than me." Let's take Jesus at his word, and have enough faith to tell that mountain and anything else that gets in the way of God vision and dream, "Move", and it will move!

As we determine our new adventures for the next five years, may we never consider any small gesture too small to be worth doing, and may we never consider any large task too big, if we have faith. May we dream God's dream, be inspired by the power that our faith give us, and be sure to act in such a way that faith is required with seeing, connecting, and respecting as our way of life and may it be the journey we are committed to be on for years to come.

