



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

## First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

### November 18, 2012

#### "How Can?" (Gospel of Luke Series)

#### Karen Makishima

I have been serving on staff at FPC for 5 ½ years now, and I realize that for some of you this is your first time to meet me. If you haven't made it downstairs, I probably haven't had a chance to meet you. There is a whole other world downstairs that I would like to invite you to peek your head in and check us out.

Now you may be feeling a little nervous about the Children's Director bringing today's message. May I please put you at ease? I have been warned not to recruit caregivers for our nursery or to use puppets during the message. I also promised not to call you out if you start to fidget or get distracted.

When Pastor Dan asked me to speak on the Kingdom of Heaven, I got so excited. I was wondering, "Hmmm, maybe we should have the worship team dance and sing to the song 'I Can Only Imagine.' Or should we dress up our Ko'olau Kids into angel costumes and parade them across the stage singing the 'Hallelujah Chorus'?" Hmmm, or maybe not. CUT!

I was curious to find out what other people at FPC had to say on the subject of the Kingdom of God. Would you watch with me a short clip of responses that some have about what the Kingdom of Heaven will be like? (A two-minute video is shown.)

Now let's see what Jesus has to say about the Kingdom of Heaven. Our Scripture passage today is from Luke chapter 13. As we progress in the Gospel of Luke, you will notice that Jesus is talking about what the Kingdom of Heaven will be like. The first-century Jews thought that the Kingdom of Heaven would come all at once, and bring a great political and powerful restoration to their nation. But Jesus had a different idea.

We will read our passage in two parts. So pull out your Bibles and let's begin to read starting with verse 18.

*Luke 13: 18-19 Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? <sup>19</sup> It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches."*

Jesus uses an analogy to tell us what the Kingdom of Heaven will be like. You would think that He would use the analogy of something magnificent to compare the Kingdom of Heaven to but He uses something small and insignificant. A mustard seed is like the Kingdom of Heaven? Really? How can?

This is what we know about the mustard seed.

1) The mustard seed comes from small beginnings.

At that time, the mustard seed was known as the smallest seed; usually they are about 1 or 2 mm in diameter.

2) A mustard seed is common. It's a common plant used for making oil, a condiment, and an herb. In the Middle East, the mustard seed grows to be a tree averaging eight feet tall and have been known to grow up to fifteen feet high.

3) A mustard seed takes time to grow. But sown in the proper soil, it can grow to be powerful and successful.

4) A mustard seed exceeds expectations. Can you believe that something so small could represent the home of our Divine?

5) A mustard seed is powerful. Jesus states in Matthew 17:20, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Jesus wants us to know that with such small faith, we can accomplish the most difficult tasks that seem impossible. I've seen the mountains. Is that power or what?

Please turn with me back to Luke 13 and let's read the second part of our scripture passage beginning with verse 20.

**A**gain He asked, “What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.” Luke 13: 20, 21

Again, Jesus is showing an analogy for us to begin to grasp what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. This is what we know about yeast.

1) Yeast has small beginnings and is common.

Baking bread was a regular occurrence that happened in the home; Jesus probably saw his mother bake bread several times throughout His life.

2) Yeast was also known as influence.

The fermentation process (which is the decaying of bacteria) affects all that come in contact with it. In the Jewish tradition, yeast is usually referred to as an evil influence. But I believe that in this passage, Jesus is referring the yeast to something good—Christian people. Yeast added to dough will change its whole character.

3) Once mixed into something, yeast becomes almost invisible.

The yeast is converting the fermentable sugars in the dough into carbon dioxide and ethanol. I am not even going to pretend that I understand this process, but this is what I do know. You cannot see the yeast at work but transformation is taking place. It works from the inside out. Once this process begins, it can't be stopped. Not

until the yeast was mixed into the dough did it have power. You see, the yeast has no power just sitting on the counter.

Friends, this makes me think that this is God's design for the advancement of the Kingdom of Heaven. His plan is to have Christians, people who long to be with Him, influencing the world from the inside out. Yes, this process gets messy, but what good is a Christian who is sitting on the counter?

But isn't this just like our Jesus? Over and over again He uses something of insignificant value (by human standards) to do something amazing, like change the world or, better yet, design eternity.

Why our Lord saw value in David the Shepherd boy when everyone else saw just a little runt of a kid. You may remember that this little runt stunned the giant Goliath with one smooth stone and then killed him with his sword

Our Lord saw value in the widow who gave 2 mites (which is the very smallest of the copper coin) and Jesus' response was that *“this poor widow has put in more than all the others. <sup>4</sup> All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”* (Luke 21: 3,4)

God wasn't concerned with the amount she gave but the willingness of her heart. The world was not impressed with her small tithe but Jesus was impressed with her huge faith.

Our Lord saw value in children. Children are vulnerable,

weak, dependent and messy, but Jesus said in *Matt. 18: 3,4* *“Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”.*

Our Lord saw value in sending His one and only Son Jesus Christ into the world into very humble beginnings. He was born in a stable, the son of a carpenter. We hardly know anything about him until he was 30 years old, and then what we know about him was not too good in the world's eyes. Jesus was not liked by most religious people. He was rejected by most and died a tortuous death.

I could go on and on with a list of insignificant people from the Bible that God used to make a huge difference for His kingdom but I won't.

So what does this passage mean for you and for me?

Maybe the Lord sees value in a kid who comes from a divorced home; a kid who was bullied from school for having the wrong color of skin; a teenage pregnant mom who dropped out of high school; a kid who felt anxious and alone, a kid who just fell under the radar to most of the world. Hey, that kid was I. All of those characteristics—every one of them—describe my life. But all along God had a plan for me.

Jeremiah 29 says, <sup>11</sup> *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. <sup>12</sup> Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.*

**Y**ou will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity."<sup>1</sup>

Now this is hope and a future! You see, looking back now I can see that God was shaping and equipping me all a long for His greater purpose. I grew up in a Christian home in Indiana where I asked Jesus in my heart and was baptized at 8 years old. Even though I was young I knew and felt the love of Jesus.

I loved being in nature. Most days you would find me riding a horse, a motorcycle or exploring the woods behind our home that my dad built for us. If it was cold outside I would be inside playing school with my dolls and my baby brother. You see, God grew in me a love for children that would last my entire life. My mom was a stay at home mom ensuring that her four little ones and her husband were well cared for.

When my dad discovered that he needed open-heart surgery his doctor had told him that he would no longer be able to drive semi trucks, which was his profession at the time. Both of my parents decided that we would sell our home, boat, camper, motorcycles and all our belongings and move to Hawaii to help a little struggling church called Palolo Valley Church of Christ. This church had about 35 people on Easter Sunday and most of the attenders were young adults. This church is where I would meet my husband.

My father would serve as an administrator and my mom

would serve in their preschool as an assistant to the teacher. My father's small disability check would not be adequate to support a family of six in these expensive islands so we would live on the church property in a very dilapidated home and live simply.

A few weeks after moving to the island, all four of us white-skinned, blue-eyed very *haole* kids would go to either Jarret Middle School or Kaimuki High School. I had the hardest time understanding the thick *pidgin* language of most of the teachers and students. Some of the local kids were very mean to me. They would push me, spit gum in my hair, and threaten to beat me up. I was so scared and afraid to go to school. Little did I know at the time that God allowed me to experience discrimination so that I would learn the importance of embracing diversity.

Within the first year of leaving our home of origin, my father chose to have an affair with one of the women in our small church. Needless to say, this tragic event devastated our entire family and church body.

My mother went into a depression and all of us four kids coped in a very unhealthy way. My brothers choose drugs, and I got pregnant at fifteen years of age, dropped out of high school and got married to basically escape. Our family had no support system. Our church was unable to support our broken family. We had no friends and no extended family on the island yet. We were so vulnerable, and Satan knew it.

But God in all His goodness provided. The same year that my

daughter was born, Focus on the Family began their ministry. I would

listen to their broadcasts on a regular basis. I would call them for advice on how to raise my child to know and love the Lord, and how to be a good wife to a man that I was not equipped to love. Focus on the Family would call me on a regular basis to see how I was doing and were very gracious to send me books on areas I was struggling through even though I had no money. I devoured each book hoping to fix my life. I would pray and be in the Word. But life was so hard.

The Lord again provided by sending me two Christian women who would pour their life into me and walk this journey together.

I had always wanted to be a teacher. I remember calling a Christian School on the island asking if I could apply for an assistant teacher position. As I was telling the principal about my life—such as I am a young mom and a high school drop out—she told me, "Why would I want to hire you?"

These words would cut me to my heart but also made me realize that if I was going to help financially support my daughter and family, I would need to go back to school. I enrolled in night school and got my GED hoping that this would fix my life. It didn't.

I would do childcare in my home for the next four years. One day I was taking my preschool-age daughter to her Head Start class, which is a state and federal program for high-risk and low-income families. They would see me each day walk her in with the five kids I watched.

**T**hey liked how I interacted with the kids in my care and asked if I would be interested in applying for a teacher's aide job, which I did.

I got the job and they encouraged me to get my bachelor's degree in Early Childhood / Elementary Education. I would go to school at night and work for Head Start during the day. Head Start even paid for most of my undergraduate degree. I was thrilled that someone saw value in me. It took me ten years to complete my degree. I was hoping that receiving this degree would fix my life but it didn't.

While being employed at Head Start, I was a teacher's aide, became a teacher, a coordinator, a director of a program, and then an evaluator. In this environment, I discovered that I have a heart for the poor and for families at risk. Head Start taught me how to look at things as systems and how these systems interact to run an effective program. It also taught me that in order to make a difference, you cannot do it alone; community partnerships are key. This skill would become vital in developing teams for ministry.

I am very grateful that somebody saw potential in me and said, "Let's invest in her." Once again God was providing for me and continued to shape and equip me for His greater purpose.

I loved working for Head Start but realized that we could offer children and families everything but the true hope of the world that is found in Jesus Christ. I knew from a very early age that if Jesus Christ is not the foundation of your life your life is built on shaky sand.

Just a side note: Now our baby girl is thirty-five years old, has an amazing Christian husband who serves as an officer in the Army, and we have four beautiful grandchildren. They currently live in Maryland.

The Lord called me to serve in full-time ministry thirteen years ago. His specific call for my life is to connect the light of the world (which is the church) to the heart of the home. I recognize that God's design for the church is to represent the fullness of Christ and to bear each other's burdens. I know the importance of having a healthy church in each our lives reminding us of our true identity in Christ. I want to be that yeast that makes a difference for the kingdom.

I am in awe how God has used the hurts of my past to make me sensitive to children and families of the future. May you all know that I am committed to the children of this church whether gifted, average or at risk. I want to affirm and give each child the best encouragement and experience of the love of God.

When you come from brokenness, it is easy to forget that you are an heir of the King. Satan continually sneaks in to kill, steal, and destroy. Each day I continue to learn how to put my small faith in our BIG God and trust that He has an amazing plan. He has taken me—a small insignificant broken person—and brought me to a place where He continues to redeem my imperfect life through being in the Word, having godly relationships and by being in His presence. One day I will be magnificent for I am His mustard seed.

As Job 8:7 says, *Though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great.*

So if your life story shows that you have small faith, humble beginnings or made bad choices then take heart because our God specializes in taking people that the world views as insignificant or small and He transforms us into something magnificent that can be used for His glory if we are open to His shaping and equipping. For in Christ we will always have a future and a hope. For all God's people said "Amen".

Would you pray with me?

Lord, thank you for accepting each of us where we are at right now. Thank You for also not leaving us here. We put our small faith, our failures, fears and insecurities in your hands and ask you to redeem them for your glory. Shape and equip us to shine your light to a world that does not understand you or your values.

Lord, we know that you have not called us to sit on the counter but through your power we can make a significant difference for your kingdom. For this is our calling as Christians. And Lord, in closing I pray that you would help each of us to grasp how wide and long and high and deep your love is for us. And Lord, show us your love that surpasses knowledge. Continue to fill each of us to the measure of the fullness of you Lord.

In Jesus' Name, Amen

\* \* \* \*

*Listen to, watch, or read this sermon and past sermons online at [www.fpchawaii.org](http://www.fpchawaii.org). You can also download sermon podcast from [www.fpchawaii.posterous.com](http://www.fpchawaii.posterous.com) or iTunes. Sermons can also be viewed on TV at KALO channel 25 (or 1025 in HD): Sundays 3 am, 11 am / Mondays 3 am, 11 am, 7:30 pm / Wednesdays 3 am, 11 am, 7:30 pm / Thursdays 3 am / Saturdays 4 am, 5 pm*