

A Good Shepherd  
**Parable**

**The Mustard Seed**

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## **THE ~ruSTARD SEED .... I\1ATERIALS**

- parable box containing:
  - yellow felt underlay
  - green felt mustard bush
  - laminated figure of the sower
  - an envelope containing:
    - 15 laminated birds
    - 15 laminated bird nests

Sower



THE MUSTARD SEED ... • MARK 4:30-32

ACTIONS

After speaking, stand up and get the parable box from its shelf.

After speaking, center the children and yourself by reverently outlining the parable box with your hand, during 10 seconds of silence.

Touch the box lightly with both hands.

Pull the box towards yourself to show ownership.

Lift one corner of the lid slightly.

Remove the lid.

Take out the yellow underlay and slowly smooth it as you speak.

Lean forward slightly and speak in a quiet and reverent voice.

WORDS

Watch carefully where I go to get this story so you will always know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

All of the words to this story are inside me. Will you please make silence with me so I can find all the words to my story?

This is called a parable box. Parables are very precious.

This box is also like a gift. It has a lid and we can open it. If we have been given a gift, then it's ours. We don't go out and buy it again, or even rent it, like a movie.

But to find out what's inside a gift we may need to open it. I would like to open this box and see if there is a parable inside it.

As we hear the story today we will find out if there is a parable in this box.

I wonder what this could be? It's very bright and very yellow. What do you think it might be?

Once there was a man who said amazing things and did wonderful things. And people began to follow him. Sometimes the people would ask him, "What is the kingdom of God like?" No one had ever been to the kingdom of God, even to visit.

Then the man said, "The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.

Place the figure of the sower on the underlay slightly left of center.

Take an imaginary seed in your hand and push it into the felt at bottom center.

Take the green mustard bush from the box and unroll it upward. Spread out all of the branches, smoothing them carefully.

Place one nest and one bird in the branches.

Pass the envelope containing nests and birds around the circle. Allow time for each child to come up and place a nest or bird in the bush.

Return the birds and nests to their envelope. Place the envelope and the sower in the parable box.

For the mustard seed is the tiniest of all seeds, so small it can barely be seen.

But when the sower plants it in the ground, it grows quickly to become one of the greatest of all bushes.

It grows very large branches so that all the birds of the air will find a place to build their nests.

Then each bird will find a safe and wonderful place to live in the shade of its branches. "

Would each of you like to put a nest or a bird in the mustard bush?

#### WONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder if the birds sang when they were in the mustard bush?

I wonder if the sower was happy to see the birds in the mustard bush?

I wonder if there were many baby birds hatched in the nests?

I wonder if the birds felt safe in their nests in the mustard bush?

Watch very carefully how I put these materials away so you will know how to do it if you make this your work today or another day.

Fold the branches of the mustard bush in towards the center. Then roll the bush from bottom to top and place it in the parable box.

Take the bottom point of the yellow underlay and place it at top center. After smoothing the felt, fold one side to lie on the other. Repeat that one more time. Fold the bottom to the top and place it in the box.

After speaking, carry the parable box back to its shelf. Place it carefully on the shelf and return to the circle.

Go around the circle having each child choose their work. Dismiss the children **ONLY** when all have chosen their work.

This mustard bush is hard to fold. If you fold in all the branches like this, it will be easier. Then carefully roll it from bottom to top. Then it will be ready to use for the next person who works with this story.

The yellow underlay is large. We will need to fold it more than once to make it fit into our box. If we put this point right by the top, then we will make a straight line. Then we can fold this side to this side, then, once more. Fold the bottom to the top. There, it will fit.

Watch carefully where I return this so you will be able to find it if you decide to make this your work today or another day.

What will you choose as your work today? Maybe there is a special feeling you have from this story of the mustard seed you'd like to paint or draw. Or maybe you'd like to make this story, or another one, your own by working with it today. Let's go around the circle and decide what work we will each do.

## **THE MUSTARD SEED .... TEACHER HELPS**

This parable is found in Matthew 13 and Luke 13, also. However, in the Gospel of Mark the Mustard Seed is one of the parables Jesus tells only to his disciples. There are no Pharisees, lawyers, scribes or even crowds around. The author of Mark presents this as a time Jesus spoke with only his disciples. It feels like a teaching session, with Jesus explaining to his disciples some of the mysteries of the coming of God's kingdom.

Often much emphasis is given to the difference between the very small mustard seed and the large bush that grows so quickly from it. While this is part of the parable, the emphasis is more importantly centered on the fact that birds of the air find a safe and secure place to nest in its branches.

The birds nesting in the branches of the bush hark back to Old Testament imagery of a great kingdom. In both Daniel 4 and Ezekiel 17 are images of trees with birds nesting in them that represent great kingdoms. Those who heard the parable of the mustard seed would know

the imagery from the "scriptures" as they called what we know as the Old Testament. This would be a powerful image and one that spoke of power as well.

In this parable the kingdom of God is ready. It has grown and provided a place for all the birds. There are no limits to the kinds of birds that are welcome in the bush. Imagine the rag tag group of followers that Jesus had. They probably would have had trouble themselves believing that their group of followers would grow to be large and powerful. And yet that was the analogy Jesus was using.

Once again, the emphasis for the children is that the kingdom of God has a safe and secure place for everyone. There will always be enough room for those who want to be part of the kingdom. In the branches of the kingdom each will be protected.

The wondering questions deal first with the feelings of the birds in the nests. Were they happy? Did they sing? Was the sower happy that the birds were in the bush? While none of these questions needs to be answered they do provide a place for the children to make a link to being happy and being part of the kingdom of God. The question that asks about baby birds being hatched in the nest is an effort to direct the thinking of the children to the understanding that the kingdom is not just for one time, but for all time, forever. They are part of the kingdom. Maybe they are first generation birds, or maybe they are the babies hatched in this wonderful, safe place.

You may have noticed that we do not capitalize "kingdom" when referring to the "kingdom of God". This is intentional. It's very easy for adults and therefore easier for children to concretize the "kingdom" as a geographical place (much like "heaven" is seen to be above the clouds). We are urging a growth for all of us to understand the "kingdom" as broader than that. It is here and now, within us, around us, and yet to be.

#### SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN:

In this story we talk about the kingdom of God. Some people consider the kingdom of God to be the perfect place. In your opinion, what would make a place perfect?

The mustard seed is a tiny seed, one of nature's smallest. What are some other little things that have great power or potential? What does this say, about the power that a child can have in life? What are some little things you've done that have had a huge effect, either good or bad?

In this parable there is room for every kind of bird that wishes to build its nest in the bush. Can you think of any place where all kinds of people are welcomed and can feel at home?