

September 25 Sermon – It's the Little Things

Think about your house, the layout of it, the color, the design, anything you can think of. Now, think about one small aspect of your house that if it suddenly disappeared, your house wouldn't feel quite right. Maybe it's special coffee mug, maybe a wall with height markers from your kids and/or grandkids, or small picture frame. Maybe that small aspect is a slight annoyance that holds a special memory, such as a chip in a mug, a slightly too tall or too short chair, or a lamp or other item that doesn't quite match the decor. Most of us will recall that in the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, the top of the banister that annoyed George so much was one of the first things he was happy to see upon returning to the world he knew. No matter what they are, those little, barely noticeable things are in our houses, are often what turn a house into a home.

Laura Ingalls Wilder said that "Home is the nicest word there is," but what makes a home, and how do these little things in our lives create the sense of home and belonging that we strive for in our lives? If I were to ask you to name your list of little things, my guess would be that it's not the things themselves that are special. My guess would be that every single one of those things has a special memory and/or person associated with it. My first day of teaching at Gaylord, my now friend Sue Moore walked into my room with a mug of coffee. Later that day, I went to return the mug to her, and along with some words of advice about my new career, she told me to keep it, so I'd have something to use. That mug still sits on my desk as a reminder that a positive message to a new teacher can have a huge influence, and my guess would be that we've all had mentors in our lives that have had just such an influence.

In our first scripture passage today, Jesus tells the story of the mustard seed, a tiny object that could easily be overlooked. However, when planted and nurtured, that seed not only grows into the largest tree but it provides shelter for the birds. It becomes a home; it gives the birds a place where they belong. Think about that. Something so small grows into something that means so much more. Something we don't even think about, like the yeast in that same passage, makes a huge difference. There are all sorts of examples of this in our lives, some that have influenced us directly and other

moments when the kindness we've witnessed between other people has left a special mark on our hearts.

Last week, Greg told a story from the rummage sale of a person generously purchasing an item for a total stranger. I was lucky enough to have a different yet similar experience this week. I have a goodie box in my classroom filled with mostly Hershey's kisses and Jolly Ranchers that I use as little rewards for various things. The last time I filled it, I found some unique flavors that the kids have enjoyed discovering. On Friday, a student who'd earned a couple of goodies came to grab them and was pleasantly surprised to see lemon Jolly Ranchers. "Oh my gosh!" he said. "I'll have to let my mom know these are back. She used to have them when she was a kid." He grabbed his couple of candies and headed out the door. About five minutes later, he came back and asked if he could exchange one of the candies he'd picked for himself for a lemon Jolly Rancher. "Mom hasn't had one of these since she was little." A small thing that will have a big influence simply because he was thinking about making someone else happy.

Throughout these weeks, we've been discussing the idea of belonging and when thinking about the mustard seed tree becoming a home, I began thinking about another concept. In our lives, we often have more than one home. Yes, we have the place we live, but there are other places in our lives where we can feel like we're home partially because of the "things" there but mostly because of the people and the sense of belonging they provide: a friend's house, our place of work, an organization, a church. Our church has built a history of welcoming in every person no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey. This idea of hospitality discussed in the second scripture passage today is the foundation of who we are. It's our rock. How? You ask. It starts at the beginning. Think about the first time you walked through those doors. My hunch is that you were greeted with a smile and a good morning, and you probably had the same experience the second time you came here. A smile and a greeting. Those might seem like the simplest things, but to someone who's new or someone feeling lost, they're so much more. They're not little things. They're huge.

I'd like to leave you with one final thought from one of the greatest souls the world has ever known, Mother Theresa. She said "We cannot all do great things, but

we can do small things with great love.” I love this quote so much that it’s actually one of the stickers on my car (ASK PETE TO SHOW PICTURE.), but I’m actually going to spin it a little. It’s true that not everyone can do something expensive or elaborate, but great doesn’t have to be expensive or elaborate. Great can be that smile, that hug, the memory behind that chipped coffee mug, that lemon Jolly Rancher. One by one, the impact of those small things with great love IS a great thing. As we move forward through our days and weeks, may we remember the mustard seeds of others that have helped build the homes in our lives. May we strive to be that seed for others, and may we live with great love. Amen.