

**Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B
(June 17, 2012)**

From Little Things

You have all heard of M. Scott Peck, haven't you? He is the author of *The Road Less Traveled*, a very popular self-help book – but a good self-help book. He wrote another book called *A Different Drummer*, and in it he talks about Community and the formation of Community. He looked back to the formation of the early Christian Community. What was it that brought people together? What attracted them to this unusual group of people? And he says this:

What really happened was that, through Jesus, the disciples and early followers had discovered the secret of community. Someone would be walking down the back alley in Ephesus or Corinth and see people sitting together talking about the strangest things that didn't make any sense at all, something about a man and an execution on a tree and visitations. But there was a quality about the way these people talked to each other, cried together, touched each other, the way they interacted with each other, so oddly compelling that strangers passing by would be drawn to them. It was as if the scent of love had drifted down the alley and could draw people like bees to a flower. And people started to say, I don't understand this yet, but I want in.

He then adds a personal experience. He says: we've done community building workshops in the most sterile hotel rooms, and desk clerks and barmaids would come by and say, "I don't know what you are doing here, but I get off at three – can I join you?" So I have an idea of how it might have worked.

Our readings today reminded me of these stories. The first reading from the prophet Ezekiel and the Gospel passage from Mark both talk about beginnings, beginnings from little things, even seemingly insignificant things, like the branch of a tree or a tiny mustard seed.

Ezekiel is talking to the exiles in Babylon, and he is assuring them that they would be freed. But he knows that those who return to Jerusalem would not be the same as those who were exiled. Many of them had died.

Some of the Jews were born in Babylon, grew up there, and were perfectly happy to stay there rather than go back to what might seem an insecure life in a ruined city that they would have to rebuild. So the prophet talks about a remnant, a faithful remnant, a small group of people that would be led home in God's good time. And from that faithful remnant, a small beginning, would grow again the great city of their ancestors.

Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like seed that grows mysteriously while the farmer sleeps, works at other things, goes about his business, enjoys a good life with his wife and children. And at harvest time there is an abundance of food. And it all began with tiny seeds.

Then he uses still another parable about seed, the mustard seed which he says is the tiniest of all seeds yet grows into a large bush that can shelter all kinds of birds in its shade.

Both of these parables tell us something about how Jesus goes about establishing God's kingdom in our midst. He doesn't try for big, spectacular events. He simply forgives people for their sins. He touches sick people and makes them well. He gives bread to hungry people. He shows compassion. He shows love. He weeps at the tomb of his friend, Lazarus. And that's what attracts people to him.

Oh, those first followers grow fearful when he is arrested and they flee. But there is a faithful remnant that hides in the upper room, locked in lest they, too, be arrested and crucified. But he does not abandon them. He comes to them as their resurrected Lord and tells them, "Peace, do not be afraid. It's all right. I am still with you and I will always be with you."

And that small group, that faithful remnant, grew to be the Church we know today.

Well, you know, as I read these stories and think about what the lessons are for us, I am sometimes tempted to think that we don't always act like the Church of Jesus Christ. I may be wrong about this, but I can't help but feel that our primary responsibility as people who call themselves Christian, followers of Jesus Christ, is to show that same compassion, understanding, forgiveness – in a word, love – that Jesus showed. I often hear people complain about the Church these days, what awful things the Church is doing. When I ask them what they mean they say, "You know, those priests abusing children, those bishops covering up for them, the

Vatican harassing nuns.” But then I try to point out to them that it’s not the Church doing those things. It’s individual people. Now those people, of course, are part of the Church, so when they do harmful things, it affects the whole Church, true enough. But the Church is still the Body of Christ and we are all parts of that Body. And when one part of the Body suffers we all suffer. What is the remedy? Well, here is my simplistic remedy, maybe naïve, but according to Jesus, it will work: go back to basics. If all of us who say we are Christians could just do what Jesus asks us to do, most of the problems would be solved. Do what Jesus did: show compassion, be understanding of others who are different in one way or another, or with whom we do not agree; forgive as we have been forgiven, and stop judging when we don’t have all the evidence.

Remember what Scott Peck said about those early Christians. They caught the scent of love wafting down the alley and they wanted to be part of it. We need to make sure that scent of love goes wafting down our streets so the whole parish could catch it, so this city, this nation, maybe even this world could catch it. Difficult, do you say? Yes it is, given human nature, given our weakness and vulnerability, given our tendencies to selfishness. But, you know what, as difficult as it may be, it is not impossible. Even for us human beings, with the grace of God, all things are possible. And, like the Kingdom of God – for that is what we’re talking about here – it all starts with little things. It all starts with just a little bit of love.