

**Pastor Tom Mortenson**

**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**September 6, 2020**

**Communion**

**Selected Scriptures**

**Prayer:** *Father, I just again thank you for who you are, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for this special day, this day set apart to focus on you and your cross. I pray this morning, Lord, that you would give us the grace and the strength and the insight that we need, that you would give us the presence of your Holy Spirit as we open up your book. May it be of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well once again, it is the first Sunday of the month, that's the day that we remember Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died he had a meeting with his disciples to share with them for the last time a Passover supper. Matthew 26 describes it. It says this: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this*

*fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* So Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols, symbols of his flesh and his blood, then he asked the disciples to eat the bread and drink the wine so that they could symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to remember this particular sacrifice on a regular basis and we do it, we call it the Lord's table. And we celebrate it once a month by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus Christ did for us at the cross, by examining our consciences, asking God's Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, by confessing those sins and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53* says: *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well, Jesus has been speaking in parables for a while now, and it started right after the Pharisees accused him of being able to do the miraculous because Satan had empowered him. Well that was the final straw for Jesus, and from that point forward he began speaking just in parables. *Mark 4:11* says: *He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you."* -- he's speaking to the disciples -- *"But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that "'They may be ever seeing and never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding;*

*otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'"* Well we've been looking at these first few parables. Jesus mostly would center around farming as the people he's addressing are largely agricultural. And we've looked so far into two different parables. We've looked at the sower and the soils. We've also looked at a statement that Jesus made about farming in general. He said in *Mark 4:26*, he said: *"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how."* Jesus is pointing out that the kingdom grows but it grows mysteriously. Just like a farmer plants his seed trusting in a process he can't possibly know or possibly understand, so too does the kingdom grow in ways that we can't possibly know or understand. And once again this morning we find Jesus teaching yet another parable and it's also about farming and he's using it to describe yet another aspect of the kingdom of God. This is the parable from *Mark 4:30*. It says: *Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."* With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own

*disciples, he explained everything.*

Well the scripture says that Jesus spoke to them in parables -- quote -- "*as much as they could understand.*" Well that says a whole lot about both Jesus and us. I mean I've used the analogy many, many times of trying to teach a German Shepherd how to play chess because once again we find Jesus, he's trying to put the eternal and limitless kingdom of God into concepts that a very limited and a very temporal understanding could grasp. It says the disciples received additional explanations from Jesus but even so, their minds were limited. Their capacity to grasp spiritual things which greatly, greatly diminished. It wasn't until the Holy Spirit opened their minds at Pentecost that they even began to grasp some of the things that Jesus had explained to them during his public ministry, but once again even those explanations couldn't fill the gap between the human and the divine. I mean there's so much that we cannot grasp about God and his kingdom, and we get tantalizing hints into that in the story of Jesus who was on the road to Emmaus. If you remember Jesus has risen from the grave and he's cloaked himself and he's accompanying two different men who don't know who he is, they're mourning the fact of his crucifixion. They don't realize that it's Jesus himself who's accompanying them and they're bitterly disappointed that Jesus isn't who they had hoped he would be. They felt crushed and that he's not the one, so they

think, that their Messiah was crucified. And Jesus is walking with them and finally he begins to abrade them for their lack of faith and then he does something spectacular. This is *Luke 24*. It says this: *He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in the scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?"*

I've said it many times, the Bible that you can get for a dollar down at the dollar store, that Bible can set your heart on fire, but only if God's Holy Spirit opens it up to you. You know, if you're into science, you can't help but be excited about all the new work that's being done on DNA. I mean, we recently found out that every one of us has this blueprint of our entire bodies

encrypted into our cells and that there's this whole encyclopedia of details from our eye color to our IQ that's encapsulated in a database that uses a particular form of RNA to read the molecule as it knits us together in our mother's wombs. It's kind of like suddenly all of a sudden something that's been closed for eons has now been flooded with light and is beginning to open up. Well Jesus is the author of DNA. Jesus created DNA. He's also the author of scripture as well. Here's the point. Jesus puts far more stock into the scripture than he ever puts into DNA. And all creation declares the glory of God but the scripture, the scripture spells it out in black and white.

During one of the many confrontations that Jesus had with the Pharisees, he pointed out that their reverence for Moses, I mean Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible and they revered Moses, he pointed out that their reverence for Moses should have resulted in reverence for himself, 'cause after all Moses was writing about Jesus. This is what Jesus said in *John 5*. He said: *"But do not think that I accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me."* And it wasn't just Moses who wrote about Jesus, it was every single author of the New Testament and the Old because every single part of scripture points inexorably toward Christ and his kingdom. And what Jesus

wants his disciples to learn -- quote -- *"as much as they could understand,"* well what he wants them to learn he can only begin to approach by trying to teach them through parables. And so he starts again with another parable, this one about a mustard seed but even this parable is shrouded in mystery. I mean all Jesus is really telling them is that there's a mustard seed and that it's the smallest of all garden seeds and that it grows into the biggest of all garden plants and birds can even perch in its branches. Listen to what he says. This is verse 31. Jesus says, it's like a mustard seed, he's describing the kingdom, he says: *"It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."* Once again that's it. That's all he said. That's all that Jesus said in describing this parable that's supposed to be illuminating the kingdom. But if I was one of the disciples, I'd be scratching my head. I would have no idea how a mustard seed is supposed to represent the kingdom of God. Now it does say that Jesus went on to explain the parables to his disciples. We don't have those conversations but we do have an understanding of types and symbols that Jesus frequently referred to, and there's an awful lot that we can infer about the kingdom just by looking at a mustard seed.

So first we want to look at what Jesus had to say about seeds in general, and we find that in the parable of the sower and the seeds. Jesus there identifies the seed. This is *Luke 8:11*. Jesus says: *"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God."* Well in the parable of the wheat and the tares Jesus lays out a lot of who else is who, just kind of like this who it is. This is *Matthew 13* and he's describing what is kind of the key to lots of the parables. He says: *"The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.* So in general Jesus is the one who sows the good seed into the world, and the seed itself stands for the people of the kingdom, the weeds are unbelievers. So to boil it all down what he's saying then is the mustard plant then is the church sown by Christ in the world made up of his chosen ones and it starts out as the smallest of seeds, it starts out singularly unimpressive and then it grows into a plant that's not really impressive at all, at least physically. And when you think of the trees that are touted as impressive in scripture, so impressive that the birds perch in their branches, we're tempted to think of very different trees like the tree that is spoken of in Daniel's book. When Nebuchadnezzar has this dream, he has a troubling vision of his kingdom and he pictures it as a



tree. This is the dream that he relates to Daniel. This is Nebuchadnezzar and he says: *The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.*

Now that's a tree. Nebuchadnezzar's tree was a tree indeed. It was the essence of what the world finds impressive, it's big, it's strong, it's highly visible. Everyone can see its strength, its power, its beauty, but not so with a mustard tree. Not so with the sower of the mustard seed, that's Jesus Christ. I mean we all know that he came to earth in the most humble of circumstance. The King and the creator of the universe was born to a peasant couple in a barn or a cave. He had a manger for a crib. One of the lesser known aspects of the humility of Christ though was his choice of his physical body, the body that he created for himself. Just like the mustard seed, it was anything but spectacular. Just think of it. Jesus could have picked any body he wanted, but he chose one that was noted for the fact that it, too, was absolutely unimpressive. A thousand years before Jesus was born, Isaiah's

prophesying about his birth and his life and he says this, he says: *Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.* You see it's clear that there's nothing about Jesus that was physically impressive. In fact when Jesus was about to be arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, he had to be pointed out to the Roman soldiers by the virtue of Judas' kiss. I mean if there was something extraordinary or outstanding about his physical presence, he wouldn't have needed to be identified at all. Judas had to point him out because he wouldn't have stood out in a crowd. God in the flesh was indistinguishable from any other man his age. I mean that alone is stunning beyond words. Paul says this in *Philippians 2:5: Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* When Jesus took on human form it was in the form of a humble servant and not Superman. I mean his church wasn't a cedar of Lebanon or a mighty tree like the one that represented Nebuchadnezzar, but instead it was this scrubby brush-like tree, a mustard plant. I mean even a

huge mustard plant would have woody branches that would sprout maybe at most twelve feet high, and it's true that birds could probably perch in its branches but it's also true as trees grow, it's no Redwood, it's no Sequoia, it's not even remotely a Cedar of Lebanon, and as a type it suited Christ's church perfectly. It suited it because, first of all, it too is physically unimpressive and it's made up of people who are not impressive at all. 1

*Corinthians 1 says: For consider your calling, brothers: Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose those what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

I've said it before many, many times but the church symbolically and in actuality stands antithetically to the rest of the world. It is the world's direct opposite. I mean the church is a mustard seed rather than a -- a mustard tree rather than a Sequoia because power is the very last thing that Jesus wants for his church. The

very nature of the kingdom of God is that it's an antithetical to the power that the world embraces. I mean after all God told Paul, my strength is made perfect in what? In weakness. Just ask yourself, has the church ever been healthy when she had power? I can think of lots of events in church history that came about when she had power, things like the crusades, the inquisition or maybe the Salem witch trials. Even more recently in our own time we had the heyday of the 80's when evangelicals were incredibly powerful. Those of us remember those days remember Jim and Tammy Fay. Jimmy Swaggart, all the others. Church was an absolute mess. Tim Keller argues that you can trace the path of the church in history and as you do, you will find that it always moves away from power. The church started in the east and it soon spread to Greece and to Rome and then to Spain and then to all of Europe and in every place she went, blessing followed. The blessing inevitably caused the powerless to become powerful, and with that power came the decline of the church.

Wherever the mustard seed was planted, it grew so large that the birds of the air came to perch in its branches. John MacArthur says this about those branches and those birds, he says this, he says: "Christ is saying, then, that wherever Christianity flourishes, the people who climb in the branches prosper, even though they don't know Christ. America is what it is today because

of its Christian heritage. There are many birds in the bush. Not all of them are Christians, but they still receive the benefits. The dignity of life in America, the jurisprudence system, the law, the sense of right and wrong, education, free enterprise, the dignity of women, and the caring of children all rise out of Christian truth. Reform movements throughout history have had their roots in biblical truth. Wherever the kingdom's influence is felt, there is an environment of protection for those who aren't even in the kingdom."

Because of that blessing every place where the church took root became a place of power. I mean think about it. The church, it took root in Europe and Europe became a world power eventually rejecting the very gospel that gave it that power. The result was that the Holy Spirit moved to a place that had no power at all, a place called America. The mustard seed took root in America and wouldn't you know it, blessing followed, and along with the blessing came, guess what? Power. And along with that power came a similar rejection of the gospel. And it can be argued today that since we are rejecting that very same gospel, the Spirit is moving again from great power to no power. There's no doubt that the church is already eclipsed in Europe. There's no doubt it's eclipsing now in America, and at present the Spirit is alive and moving and flourishing in Africa and China where the church has

little or no power at all.

Marvin Olasky writing in *World Magazine* said he wouldn't be surprised if by 2050 China was the largest Christian nation in the world. Jesus laid it all out over 2,000 years ago. And he tied it all together with these parables. And in these three parables Jesus has spoken first about soils, then he's spoken about the sower of the good seed, now he's talking about the seed itself. And we learn from Jesus that only good soil produces fruit. And that the sower sows good seed in good soil but there's an enemy and the enemy has over sown that soil so that good and bad seed now mingle together. Now we learn something about the nature of this seed itself, and that is the mustard seed. It's humble because it's the smallest of seeds but there's another thing about seeds that Christ certainly intends to teach, and that it grows only by dying, sometimes figuratively, sometimes literally, but always by dying. Jesus said in *John 12:24*: "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*" See growth as a Christian necessitates dying, dying to the flesh, dying to the lure of this world, dying to self.

As we begin to contemplate taking the bread, I want us to consider this morning the cost of the kingdom. Take a few moments to think

on this question: Am I willing to die for the kingdom of God? Consider also God's warning about taking communion as we find in *1 Corinthians 11* which says this: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* And again I say this every time, I said communion is extraordinarily serious business and I beg you, do not partake in an unworthy manner. To do so is to court disaster. If you're not absolutely confident that you're a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your savior, if you still feel that you need to be reconciled to your brother before you bring the sacrifice of your presence before his altar, then just don't participate. If you don't feel right about participating, err the side of caution and get right with God first.

And again we say this each time as well, you can make the mistake on the other side of thinking, okay, I have to be spotlessly perfect or else I can't receive communion. Well, the enemy loves that as well. You see, being a child of the King doesn't mean that you don't sin, it doesn't mean that you don't ever fail. It means

that you recognize that the salvation that you have been given is a gift that no one is capable of earning by being good. Each month we repeat Dane Ortlund's quote because it so aptly sums up our situation. He says: "In the kingdom of God the one that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." It also means that when we do fail we are aware that we failed. Why? Because God's Holy Spirit is now living inside us and so we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who longs to forgive and cleanse us, who says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the King doesn't mean that we're spotless or sinless, it means that we recognize that we have an advocate with the Father when we sin. There's someone up in heaven speaking on our behalf. *1 John 2* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.* See it's because we have Jesus' righteousness and let me just again describe how that happened. God became a man and he lived his life on this earth perfectly so that he could go to the cross and offer that life up as a ransom and sacrifice, so that we by faith in him could get this incredible transformation. We exchange our wretchedness, our sin, for his righteousness. His righteousness becomes our righteousness when we by faith trust him



as our Lord and Savior. And because we have his righteousness and not our own, we are now free to eat from his table. And so if you love the Lord, don't deny yourself this privilege that Jesus purchased for you at the price of his own life. As we say, he lived the life that we were supposed to live and then he died the death we all deserved to die so that we could be made worthy of heaven. He died for us. So the question we want to ask ourselves this morning is are we willing to die for him? Take a moment to consider that as you take the bread.

*1 Corinthians 11:23 says: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." So take, and eat.*

Well the mustard seed grows not into a towering cedar, but instead into a scrubby ubiquitous tree that birds take shelter in. Interestingly enough, one of the big problems that farmers have when they grow mustard is its ubiquity. Simply put that means that once it starts growing, it really starts popping up everywhere. Farmers have to isolate fields if they're going to grow mustard because the tiny seed takes it everywhere and it just overwhelms the adjoining fields. It becomes a nuisance that can't be stopped

in many fields in the world. Fields like China and Africa and Indonesia, in Vietnam, in Columbia and Uganda, Sudan and the Philippines, anywhere the gospel goes, anywhere the master plants it, it eventually flourishes. Some fields treat the mustard seed as a nuisance and just try to make life difficult for it. Other fields treat its presence as a matter of life and death and they'll go to extraordinary lengths to eradicate it. And we've seen the lengths that people go to oftentimes through *The Voice of the Martyrs* and I've mentioned many times how I respond to getting the magazine each month. Once a month we get this very disturbing magazine that I don't want to read -- which I do, I read it from cover to cover, I don't want to read it because it makes me feel guilty, guilty for how easy we have it, guilty for how blessed we are, guilty for the courage of those who for the gospel's sake are beaten and imprisoned and sometimes executed.

*The Voice of the Martyrs* had a report about one of our brothers planted by the Master in China. I spoke about this just last year. This is the letter that they had or the article that they had written. It says this: "Since 1979, Brother Liu has been arrested so many times that he has lost count. He declares, "the Lord told us it is a rough road, following his path. It is a road where one has to take up his cross in order to follow him." Brother Liu was labeled a 'non-repentant prisoner.' He endured much hardship while

he was in prison. During one beating, his ears were beaten with an electric baton. His injuries caused him great pain and suffering for six months. He says, 'I experienced too much of these things, but I have to confess the most precious thing I have ever learned is that the Lord suffered more than we did. My family has not fallen away in the midst of our suffering. Rather we become bolder following the Lord. Now my children are in the ministry and they inherit our wonderful examples following him to the end.' Brother Liu is a member of the prayer team of his house church and prays for the church and ministry. When asked what he would like to tell others about his testimony, he said, 'Drink the cup that Jesus drinks. For a student is not above his teacher. Our light troubles our temporary, beatings are temporary, pain is also temporary, but the eternity and joy is everlasting.'"

Brother Liu is quoting *2 Corinthians 4:16*, which says this:

*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

See, Brother Liu is focused on the first part, I mean, that's to

say his light and momentary troubles are achieving for him an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. But we don't suffer like Brother Liu does. I mean we live in the most prosperous, safest, most blessed country on earth. So here in America we have to focus on the last part of that verse, and there Paul says: *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* You know when you're young, I mean life seems like this endless ride and you're on this journey that will never stop and the road is all stretched out in front of you. Because of that we tend to focus as we're young on what is seen, on what is temporary. But after you've gone through life for a good while you begin to see more and more of it through the rearview mirror. That is through things that you've already done, and the last thing I want is for that view in my rearview mirror to be empty. I want it to be full, I want it to be rich, I want it to be full of what is unseen and what is eternal. I want the fruit that my persecuted brothers have for eternity. So I mean I read these reports of people who are beaten and they're tortured for Christ and I see them responding with love for those who have imprisoned and beaten them and I realize I'm not fit to tie these folks' shoelaces. Most of them don't even have shoes. They are the good seed sown in good soil, humbled seed dying to produce fruit, fruit that brings honor and glory to Christ through sufferings. That's how the mustard seed grows in many,

many parts of the world. I mean we've learned in the parable of the wheat and the tares that the field is the world and the master is the one who owns the fields. It's his world, and it belongs to him. The seeds are sown wherever His Spirit desires, first in Jerusalem, then in Greece, then Rome, then Europe, then America, now Africa and China, then the rest of the world. Everywhere the humble mustard seed goes, humble mustard trees grow and many birds take refuge in their branches.

Now that picture that Jesus is painting, that picture was yet another shock to the disciples. What? In their mind it wasn't supposed to be that way, I mean, they thought they were supposed to separate themselves from the rest of the world and now they learn that the mustard tree is going to draw all kinds to them. They learn the challenge is going to be handling the power that would come as well. You see, Jesus has been at this work for thousands of years before he even called the disciples and it's now been thousands of years since that day and the battle is still raging on. See what happened in Europe happened next in America and it's happening now in Africa and China. It's because God's plan hasn't changed from the instructions that he gave his disciples. He's still planting good seed in good soil, the smallest of all agricultural seeds that grows everywhere into a humble tree by dying as all seeds must.

So what does this mean to us? Well there's one thing that I want you to realize this morning. I want you to realize that you are not sitting in a church, you're sitting in a mustard tree. And it's still growing and the birds are starting to nest in its branches and there's still a great deal more room for growth, for stronger branches to support more birds. And we are what makes the mustard seed grow and we live like good seeds live. And how do you do that? By dying to the world, by dying to self, dying to the devil and living for Christ. Okay. Practically how do we do that? Well for one, practically it means supporting our brothers and sisters who are being actually persecuted for their faith. *The Voice of the Martyrs* is a great place to start. Pastor Papaf and our sister church in India is another great place. And secondly we seek to grow the mustard seed that we are part of at 25 Sullivan Avenue. And how do we do that? Well, I'm going to give you an inside piece of information. I'm going to give you a tip. I'm going to give you a piece of information that a lot of people don't realize. There is one thing that makes mustard seeds grow. There's actually one word that makes mustard seeds grow and that word is prayer. Prayer. This is a church that was grounded and founded by prayer. And whether it was Bertha or Jean or Helen or Eleanor or Sylvia, all of those women, older women, who made it their business to pray for this church and every person who walked through those doors. They're the ones who got us here. God has

taken the people in leadership here and spoken through the scriptures to say you're not the most gifted of speakers or planners or administrators, but if you seek my will in prayer, I will guide you, I will instruct you, I will warn you, I will empower you to grow like a mustard seed, and the birds will nest in your branches. We've been around for 29 years for that reason alone. I mean that article I just read, do you remember what Brother Liu did that made him such a threat to the authorities? I mean do you recall what his job was? The article said -- quote -- "Brother Liu was a member of a prayer team of his house church and prays for the church and its ministry." Could it be that the Chinese enemies of the church see more value, more danger in prayer than we do? And I thank God for the faithful ones who come out for corporate prayer because they get it, but they're very, very few in number and I'm open to any kind of creative way to engage the enemy through prayer, but we are nowhere near being a church of prayer. I've said it before and I'll say it again, until we get a handle on the absolute necessity of the power expressed through prayer, we will go nowhere. God is content to let us spin our wheels.

So how does the kingdom of God start? It starts with the planting of a mustard seed. And the mustard seed was planted with the death and the resurrection of the sower and it grows like all seeds do, by dying, and it will end up just like the master said it would in

Matthew 24, he said: *"And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."* We want to be part of that process. We want the mustard seed to grow in Port Jervis. And when we look back at our own individual rearview mirrors we want to see -- quote -- *"The smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."* We want the birds to come and nest in our branches not because of our talents or our gifts or our cleverness but because of his grace and his power, and we do that first and foremost through prayer. Through prayer we plant a seed that grows only through dying. Again, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* And so as we are about to take the cup, I ask that you would ask, Lord, who can I be a sower of your word to? 1 Corinthians says: *In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* So take and drink.

This is the part that we call heart, hands and feet, where we try to have some kind of practical understanding of what it means to remember Christ and his cross. And one thing that I wanted to address at this time, just this idea that there's -- there is so



much strife, there is so much division, there's so much violence going on in our country right now that people genuinely feel that it's coming apart. And they wonder what in the world can I do? Well there's something that only mustard seeds can do and I can tell you it is far more powerful than anything including a national election can do. *2 Chronicles 7:14* which says: *If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.* Now you may have seen in your bulletins, there's a flier there about Franklin Graham, he's organizing a national prayer gathering. And what really struck me about this is the description of the gathering. This is what really sealed the deal for me. He says this, he says: "We need to pray now more than ever, than we've ever done in our life," he said. "Our communities are hurting, our people are divided, and there's fear and uncertainty all around us. So let's join together and do the most important thing, and that is to pray. We're going to pray that God will intervene and save this nation." Listen to how they're going to do that. It says: The Washington prayer march 2020 event is a dedicated prayer march that is focused solely on asking God to heal our land. It is not a protest or political event, and we are asking participants to not bring signs in support of any candidate or party. What will happen: At each stop, we will pray silently using the focus and prompts for each

location. There will be no microphones or audio amplification for the march. After a set period of time, we will move on to the next stop. When? Saturday, September 26, along the National Mall, starting at the Lincoln Memorial and ending at the U.S. Capitol. It'll be starting at noon and it will go for approximately two hours.

I just picture hundreds of thousands of people silently moving from place to place with no fanfare, no anything, nothing but prayer to God. I find that far more powerful than anything, including an election. Janice and I are trying right now, we're trying to make arrangements to see if we can get down there to actually spend that time there. If not, we'll be up here because there's going to be some local services that kind of reflect what's going on in Washington. There's going to be an outdoor public prayer on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. This is still in the planning stages. People would line up six feet apart on the streets of Milford, Matamoras and Port Jervis to show that the church is here and praying for our nation. And then there's going to be a simulcast on Saturday. Again, a lot of these things are in flux right now, they're still in the planning stage. But I just want to say that the most important thing that you can do right now for our country is cry out to God. That's the only thing that's going to make a difference. Let's pray.

*Father, we do cry out to you and we do look around at a country that seems to be coming apart. And we just first of all thank you that we're that mustard seed, that you've given us this incredible privilege, you've given us the ability to see that you are the one who is sovereign, you are the one who is in charge and for thousands of years kingdoms have come and gone and people have moved in all kinds of different directions but always you are in charge and your plan is still ongoing. And so, Lord, I pray for this time that's going to take place at the end of September, I pray for the nation, I pray that we would recognize the incredible importance of us repenting and turning to you and seeking your face and praying. Give us a heart for that prayer, I pray, give us a heart for repentance, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*