

I believe we human beings have a perception problem. We often think we have the proper perspective on an issue when in fact we are way off.

There's a charming story that Thomas Wheeler, one time CEO of the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company (a.k.a. MassMutual), tells on himself: He and his wife were driving along an interstate highway when he noticed that their car was low on gas. Wheeler got off the highway at the next exit and soon found a rundown gas station with just one gas pump. He asked the lone attendant to fill the tank and check the oil, then went for a little walk around the station to stretch his legs.

As he was returning to the car, he noticed that the attendant and his wife were engaged in an animated conversation. The conversation stopped as he paid the attendant. But as he was getting back into the car, he saw the attendant wave and heard him say, "It was great talking to you."

As they drove out of the station, Wheeler asked his wife if she knew the man. She readily admitted she did. They had gone to high school together and had dated steadily for about a year.

"Boy, were you lucky that I came along," bragged Wheeler.

"If you had married him, you'd be the wife of a gas station attendant instead of the wife of a chief executive officer."

"My dear," replied his wife, "if I had married him, he'd be the chief executive officer and you'd be the gas station attendant." Yes, we often think we have the proper perspective on an issue when in fact we are way off. Jesus understood this propensity for us humans to get it wrong. Especially when it comes to things spiritual. So he told a few parables. He said the kingdom of heaven is like:

A small seed. A mustard seed to be precise. Why did Jesus choose such a small item to represent something so large as heaven? He did this because even though the Kingdom of Heaven is enormous we often are blind to its presence. Do you hear the irony in Jesus words? The KINGDOM OF HEAVEN is like a mustard seed. If you have ever seen a mustard seed then you know what a ridiculous statement this is. They are as small as a grain of sand. You can literally hold thousands of them comfortably in the palm of your hand. Yet it grows into a very large bush. Large enough for birds to build their nest among its branches.

What is Jesus saying? He is saying, "God is at work, even though our human eyes often fail to perceive what is happening."

As Christians we understand that imperceptible things have real influence, but we live in a society that is enamored with bigness. We have gone beyond big churches to mega-churches. We are over whelmed with and bedazzled by huge social problems such as world hunger and children in crises. As a result, we sometimes overlook the tiny seed problems that are at the root of so many of these difficult situations.

It's the little things. Tiny viruses the size of a pin head, heart valves no larger than a man's thumbnail, single votes in an election, an ill-chosen word from a loved one - **little things have tremendous power.**

Matthew 13 records the story Jesus told about the smallest thing His audience could identify with--a mustard seed. We should not underestimate the impact of little events.

Sometimes it takes just a little bit of patience to work with people. Sometimes it takes just a little bit of love to redeem a situation. Sometimes it takes just a little bit of grace to bring about healing. Sometimes it takes just a little bit of understanding to save a marriage.

Let me tell you that when God moved in history for the salvation of mankind, he did not do so with a legion of angels, or some grand computer, or some meeting of all the principalities of the earth. He did so with a seed planted in the womb of a peasant girl. That microscopic seed would one day grow to full life and change the world and die for your sins and mine.

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Imperceptible things have real influence. And that, Jesus said, is what heaven is like.

Secondly he said that the Kingdom of *Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field.* Jesus has said elsewhere that it is difficult if not impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. But here he says that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. In other words the kingdom is like a

lot of loot stashed away somewhere. The difference in these two teachings is this: In one he is talking about the rich and in the other he is talking about the Kingdom of Heaven. The criticism of the rich is a direct statement of fact. The illustration about the Kingdom being a hidden treasure is a simile. It is a figure of speech using the word "like." "The Kingdom of heaven is **LIKE a hidden treasure**" is poetry. Apart from the buried treasures of great price, we see in today's Gospel; there is a storeroom full of choices of treasures too in the world around us. Using figures of speech, to describe hidden treasures all around us, I want to compare the beginnings of morality, of character, and the critical part adults play in the making of moral people, of which we seem to be in short supply these days. **There are plenty of treasures missed at that early stage of life.**

My point is that the moral person of character is the result of drawing from the storeroom of treasured, witnessed experiences and memories buried early and daily in his/her heart by his parents and mentors and other significant adults.

My point is that the greatest gift we give the next generation are moral treasures in the storeroom of their psyches that they can discover and draw on in later life. *The real tragedy in some of today's kids is there is no treasure in the field, only an empty field.* That is, their moral storeroom is empty. There is no deep, subconscious resource to plumb, because they have been raised in a moral vacuum by poor models, or they have been physically, emotionally, and morally abandoned by their parents, and so are left only with the constructed celebrities of false guides!

Our example, our witness count and have effects we don't always realize. I remember years ago some reporters were interviewing Russian Premier Boris Yeltsin, asking him what gave him the courage to stand firm during the fall of communism in the former USSR. Interestingly, he credited the electrician from Poland, Lech Walesa, who started the downfall of communism there. When Walesa was interviewed and asked what inspired him, he said it was the civil rights movement in the United States led by Martin Luther King.

When King was interviewed and asked what inspired him, he said it was the courage of one woman, Rosa Parks, who refused to move to the back seat of the bus. Is it too much of a strain to say that the moral courage of a brave little woman in the South brought about the downfall of communism? **Hidden treasures are like that.** And that is the lesson

Third, Jesus said that heaven is like a merchant in search of pearls; on finding the one pearl of great price he sold all that he had to buy it. This time it is not a hidden treasure, which is found by accident but a pearl on sale in the market place. *The merchant finds the precious stone in his daily business rounds. His response? That's the important part.* His response tells us the meaning of Jesus' parable. He sells everything he possesses in order to possess the pearl.

I like the ancient legend about the monk who found a precious stone, a precious jewel. A short time later, the monk met a traveler, who said he was hungry and asked the monk if he would share some of his provisions. When the monk opened his bag, the traveler saw the precious stone and, on an impulse, asked the monk if he could have it. Amazingly, the monk gave the traveler the stone.

The traveler departed quickly overjoyed with his new possession. However, a few days later, he came back, searching for the monk. He returned the stone to the monk and made a request: "Please give me something more valuable, more precious than this stone. Please give me that which enabled you to give me this precious stone!"

A commitment of the whole heart, that's what heaven...the Kingdom of Heaven requires of its followers.

I love this last parable because Jesus does not say the Kingdom of Heaven is like a pearl of great price. He says the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant, a merchant who finds a great deal on a flawless stone and does everything in his power to close the sale. **That's commitment to a greater cause. That's sacrifice and hard work. That's what heaven is like. Amen.**