

IT'S DYNAMITE!
Lake Joseph Community Church
July 25, 2019

Those Toronto Raptors are really something, aren't they!? They've not only won their first NBA Championship, but they've widened the popularity of the great game of basketball in Canada and become the best loved sports team in the country. There's a lot to impress about that great team, but what might impress us most is the size of the players. They're all very BIG, and in that particular sport being tall and strong is a definite advantage. There seems to be a definite link between bigness and success in the whole world of sports, and the same can be said of other social institutions. For example when it comes to military might, political leverage and business competition, size matters.

And the same may be true when it comes to churches. What churches do we most hear about? What churches do we consider most successful? What churches do we believe make the biggest impact? Of course it's the large churches, sometimes termed "megachurches, (or even "gigachurches" today!). These are the congregations that are determined most effective, most productive. Their size gives them power.

But what about the many small churches we see around us today, including perhaps the congregations of which we're a part? Is anything happening there? Are they making any difference in the world? The surprising answer is that yes indeed, many are fruitful and effective, and it's a good idea for us to consider what a difference our smaller churches can make for the Kingdom even in days of shrinking resources when we have a tendency to feel discouraged.

We're helped in our consideration by the series of parables recorded for us in the fourth chapter of Mark's Gospel where Jesus speaks of the amazing power to be found in a small seed sown in the ground. He begins with the famous "Parable of the Sower," which reminds us that a seed will grow according to the soil in which it's sown. The hard impermeable soil on the path produces no growth, the rocky soil at the edge of the garden prevents the roots from reaching deep enough to sustain life. Then where there are thorns and weeds the seed is strangled and soon dies, while the seed that lands on good soil thrives and grows. As Jesus explains, the message of the Kingdom of God receives a similar mixed response in the various situations where it's "planted."

This is to be expected, and a close study of the Gospels shows how it happened in Jesus' own ministry. Some embraced His message and faithfully followed Him, others took shallow interest, looking for benefits for themselves, and quickly left Him when it became obvious that He wouldn't deliver what they were looking for. A few more pursued Him until the going got tough and then they deserted Him, while a great many rejected the message altogether and finally sent Jesus to the cross.

And as it happened to Jesus in His ministry, so it has occurred in the history of the church called to sow the seed of the Word in every generation. There have been a variety of responses to the church's message throughout the ages. But this fact shouldn't discourage us and certainly it should not cause us to give up, because sowing the seed of the Kingdom is the very purpose for which the church exists. We need to be faithful to our calling. And when we're faithful, surprising results follow.

Our power to effect change, deliver a prophetic message and bring compassion and grace where they're so desperately needed seems so small in a world so big, so overwhelmed with huge problems. and where we face issues of profound complexity. We live in a culture where many reject our message and resent our presence in the world. We feel inadequate to the challenge before us, and we may ask with Paul, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

The answer is found in Jesus' brief parable of the mustard seed. The tiny seed is planted in the ground, and our Lord tells us, "when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all the shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." We'd like to interpret this parable to mean that when the Kingdom is planted it grows until it embraces the whole world. But the message isn't about what is produced at the end. No, it's about the incredible power embodied in that very small seed. It contains a most amazing potential to hugely affect its environment wherever it's

sown. In fact, taking the Greek word for power, (dynamis) we could say it has a capacity to be like dynamite in its ability to accomplish its purpose!

As small and insignificant as the Christian Church appears, and as powerless as we Christians may seem to some, when we're faithful to our calling in the world and when we're doing all we can to accomplish our mission, we'll see amazing results. Let's not give up, and may we never be discouraged, but continue to sow the seed of the Kingdom in our needy world, confident that we do indeed make a difference for God's Kingdom wherever we are planted!