

Start Small  
[Romans 8:26-39](#)  
[Matthew 13:31-33](#)

I have often looked at the massive mess known as my kitchen and wanted to turn around, grab my keys and kids, hop in the car and go out to dinner. As we all know, on a limited budget of daily calories and dollars, that is not always possible. In addition, the cyclone-stricken kitchen is there waiting for me when I get back. I found a better way to tackle the massive mess was to break it down into parts, delegate what I could to my most eager helpers, and take a piece at a time – the dishes, the stove, the floor, the counters, the table. With proper planning and delegation, I don't feel quite so overwhelmed and I could handle each piece in a fairly logical manner. I had to start small.

In the scripture reading from Matthew, Jesus uses 2 parables to describe this principle. In the first he talks

about a mustard seed and how extremely small those seeds are compared to others. Yet 1 mustard seed can produce a very large plant. From something very small, an end product is derived that is grander than most other plants.

You've heard the cliché, 'Big things come in small packages'. I believe the message is to not judge something by its small size. Many things that start small often produce a sizeable return.

I think this is an appropriate principle for any size church, but particularly a small one like Mt. Tabor. The conference considers any church with less than 100 people in average weekly attendance to be a small church. They also state that the vast majority of all churches within the conference fall into this category, so we are in good company. What is it about a small church that most people find appealing? When folks seek out a church, why do they

often choose a small church? Is it convenience? Is it the fact that if there are more small congregations out there, luck-of-the-draw would have them landing in a small church? That might get them in the door, but what keeps them coming back?

Perhaps we question our ability to do anything that competes with larger churches. The fact is, we don't want to compete at all. Our goal is to help people find a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. But with limited resources and a small church image, maybe we feel like the mustard seed among other much larger seeds; or maybe we feel like I do when staring at the seemingly overwhelming task of 'finding' my kitchen.

So let's start small. Let's look at specific areas to focus on to keep from becoming overwhelmed and frustrated. I've used an analogy with members of the

leadership team here at Mt. Tabor. I feel we are on the verge of something – like something is bubbling just under the surface. If you have ever been bored enough to watch water boil – and yes a watched pot does boil – you see small bubbles form along the edges of the surface and finally the right temperature is hit, all factors are in place, and soon you have a full rolling boil. Are we prepared for what is to come? This congregation is feeling new life that can only come from the Holy Spirit. There is a charge in the air. We have planted the mustard seed and the new plant is getting ready to break the surface. Some of us may be a bit cautious, seeing this period as the calm before the storm. I'm sure there are plenty of clichés you could use to describe this time. 'Things are about to snowball'. 'A top spinning out of control'. 'Too Fast – Too Furious'.

Growth can bring its challenges.

Consider the second parable Jesus uses in Matthew chapter 13. The old-fashioned method for making bread involved some physical work – specifically with the kneading process. Have you ever thought of it from the perspective of the bread? First you get pounded from all sides, turned inside out, then pounded some more! You finally get to rest a bit, only to be punched down again and finally the tiny yeasts take hold and start the process of adding air to the dough and literally pushing the dough out on all sides. Then just when you think everything is good, you get put in an oven! But I don't know about you, but to me there are few things better than fresh, hot bread right out of the oven.

I'm guessing we have all seen our share of pounding. We tend to question God about the purpose for all this turmoil. We simply cannot understand what is going on

and at times we may feel our faith is hanging on by a thread.

I believe God has brought us together for a purpose – to strengthen each other as we share the love of Jesus Christ with our community. The mustard seed is being planted. The yeast is in the dough. Working with each person here we can develop a plan of action to focus on specific areas to reach our community and share God's love. We are starting small in order to tackle our calling. I am asking for everyone's input so we can make smart, Spirit-guided choices that will lead us toward our vision. In a broad sense, our vision is to share God's love with our community both near and far.

There is an excitement that is building here that is contagious. We have the wonderful gift of Jesus Christ to share with our community – that's exciting. We have a

faithful group of people here that have been refined by fire and are eager to share – that’s exciting. We have a group of young people that are open to hearing the word of God in a confusing, mixed up world – that’s exciting! We have faithful prayer warriors that continue to lift up the people of Mt. Tabor and community in prayer and are seeing the fruits of that dedication to prayer – that’s exciting! We have folks that are recognizing their spiritual talents and putting them to use to further God’s kingdom here in our community – THAT’S EXCITING!

So now what? How do we keep from becoming overwhelmed as we look at our enormous task? How do we bottle this excitement to keep from becoming a flash in the pan that shines briefly but quickly goes away? We plan. We set a course, launch away from the pier, and continue to monitor our progress. At times we will need to

make minor course corrections. At times we may need to retrace our steps and go in a different direction. At times we will need to listen to our team members who suggest completely different strategies. But we must always be in tune with God. If we steer away from God's plan for us we will surely fail.

God has a purpose for us here at Mt. Tabor. Our scripture lesson from Romans states, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who are called by his purpose." Sometimes it is difficult to hear God's calling, as it is at times a still small voice.

Other times it is very easy to hear God's call – sometimes it is like a bolt of lightning! (I plan to share my own personal road to Damascus experience which has nothing to do with driving south on Rt. 27 from Mt. Airy!) There was a movie out a while ago called Bruce Almighty where the main

character Bruce is at the end of his rope and prays to God to send him a sign. Quite literally, Bruce is driving behind a truck that is filled with flashing signs saying, “Caution”, “Wrong Way”, “No through traffic”; but Bruce cannot see the obvious. I think that can be true for all of us. What keeps us in tune with God is fellowship with other Christians, worship, prayer, and regular Bible study. We are here to answer God’s call.

As a focused, dedicated, tuned-in group of Christians, I present excerpts from the passage in Romans chapter 8:

“Who can separate us from the love of Christ? I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Thanks be to God. Amen.