



Sunday, June 13, 2021  
The 3rd Sunday after Pentecost  
Rev. Emily Williams Guffey  
Recognition of Sunday School  
Mark 4:26-34

The focus of this service is on our Sunday School participants -- students, teachers, leaders, readers, coordinators, supporters, acolytes, musicians, parents -- both at and with Christ Church Detroit and also in their/our other schools and educational settings.

This, of course, has been a year like no other. As it concludes, we may have many feelings, feelings that we previously might not have felt or associated with this time. For me, conclusions of other school years have felt more straightforwardly celebratory, and this one is more than that, different than that.

I speak as a lover of the Bible and as a parent whose elementary school kids have happened to be in virtual school since the pandemic started, and, since I know and love that our Scriptures bear witness to the full range of human emotion, I admit that I, in that spirit, feel more...I feel **more**...at this time than I have in previous years.

I want to share, then, a bit of personal reflection, which I offer not for personal feedback or support, but just because sharing how we're doing - especially in the midst of momentous things - is a part of our tradition, and, although most of us understandably feel isolated in our recent experiences and emotions, we are not actually alone in them.

So, first of all, as I reflect upon the conclusion of this school year, I feel relieved - and I know I'm not alone in that! As a parent, I feel relieved to not need to keep up with their classes, relieved that this summer is poised to have, I hope, less to keep up with. And I know you students and teachers are relieved, too.

I feel poignant that I will no longer see my kids' teachers every day. They have been - each of them - absolute anchors in our lives. They have shown up on Zoom every day and modeled so much hope, empathy, compassion, encouragement - more than I thought was humanly possible - and all, of course, without the natural, relational feedback of a classroom, which is probably the setting that drew them into teaching in the first place. Fortunately, their gifts and skills are so profuse that they translated seemingly effortlessly and easily into Zoom - even though I know nothing was easy nor effortless - and my kids looked up to them and relied upon them, from home.

I feel impressed and grateful that progress was made! The kids learned and improved in reading and math, even surrounded by screens, LEGOs, and stuffed animals - and, yes, finally a dog - rather than surrounded by their peers.

Christ Church Detroit  
960 East Jefferson Avenue, Detroit, MI 48207  
313-259-6688 | [www.christcd.org](http://www.christcd.org)

I feel encouraged that the kids have been able to see their peers recently through outdoor spring sports and have begun to renew relationships and their physical condition and their sense of fun.

I feel heartened by friendships I'm forging among the parents on the sidelines, as we all emerge tenderly and wide-eyed. Where I previously may have taken small talk for granted, I do not anymore, and I'm energized to get to know them and their families and to feel physical, local community again.

I feel confused about where my kids stand and if they've learned enough and if I've made the right decisions on their behalf, from the upside-down menu we've all been handed.

I feel apprehensive about the start of the next school year, and how I can help equip them for their next adjustments and transitions and, hopefully, successes.

I savor the time and the closeness we've had, yet otherwise wouldn't have had, throughout this past year. I treasure the opportunity to have been sitting right next to them while they've tried and learned, and I've gained insight into where they struggle and where they shine, and I try to encourage them daily. I aim to help them feel safe and secure. And if I've managed nothing else in the past year, I hope it is that.

In the lens of today's Gospel, I admit I also can't help but feel small: humbled, as we all have been, by the virulent injustices we inhabit; humbled that meager flames of love and justice are truly life-changing, whether we understand that or not; humbled by how we are connected, by breath. I also feel small in the sense of defeated, because this year's conditions have been a bit much - and they were disparate and difficult before that, let us not forget - and this conclusion is not the end.

In light of the parable of the mustard seed,, if we feel small--smaller than small, imperceptibly small as a mustard seed--God takes note. God does small. God loves small. In small, God does not see defeat as we do (I do) but sees possibility, sees future. In arid, unlikely conditions, God grows. So, if we parents, teachers, students, supporters, after a school year like this feel like solitary mustard seeds cast upon sand without water, with too much sun, with too much awake, and too little rest and nourishment, that is not the end, and that is not all, because God sees us - and sees in us our future.

The fact is that our God has a green thumb -- like, really, really green -- and loves to grow giant foliage in the desert from seemingly nothing. With our God, it takes just a wisp of a seed, especially one that is scorched; it takes just a hint of a dream, especially one that is abandoned; it takes just a mirage of hope, and God makes it real. We know not how.<sup>1</sup> In the multitude of emotions we feel at this moment, it may be the "truth we trust the least".<sup>2</sup> Yet it is nevertheless true.

So, my beloved seeds, take heart, for you are in the palm of God's hand, exactly where you need to be, and your Creator delights in you. With you, God is well pleased. And this is not the end--neither can we go back, exactly, to what was, as a seed cannot go back to the plant that bore it, nor a plant to the seed from whence it came--but all rise to the light, and flourish, and grow.

But first, summer vacation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark 4:27

<sup>2</sup> "God of Little Things" by David Bjorlin and Benjamin Brody (copyright 2021, GIA Publications, Inc.) was the opening hymn at this service.

**Christ Church Detroit**  
**960 East Jefferson Avenue, Detroit, MI 48207**  
**313-259-6688 | [www.christcd.org](http://www.christcd.org)**