

## LESSON 12

# PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

### LESSON NOTES

**FOCUS: THE MUSTARD SEED AND SHRUB (MATTHEW 24:32;  
MARK 4:30-32; LUKE 13:18-19)**

- **PARABLE**
- **CORE PRESENTATION**

### THE MATERIAL

- **LOCATION: PARABLE SHELVES**
- **PIECES: PARABLE BOX WITH YELLOW DOT, GREEN FELT SHRUB (OR TREE), GOLD BOX WITH BIRDS AND NESTS, FIGURE OF A PERSON**
- **UNDERLAY: YELLOW**

### BACKGROUND

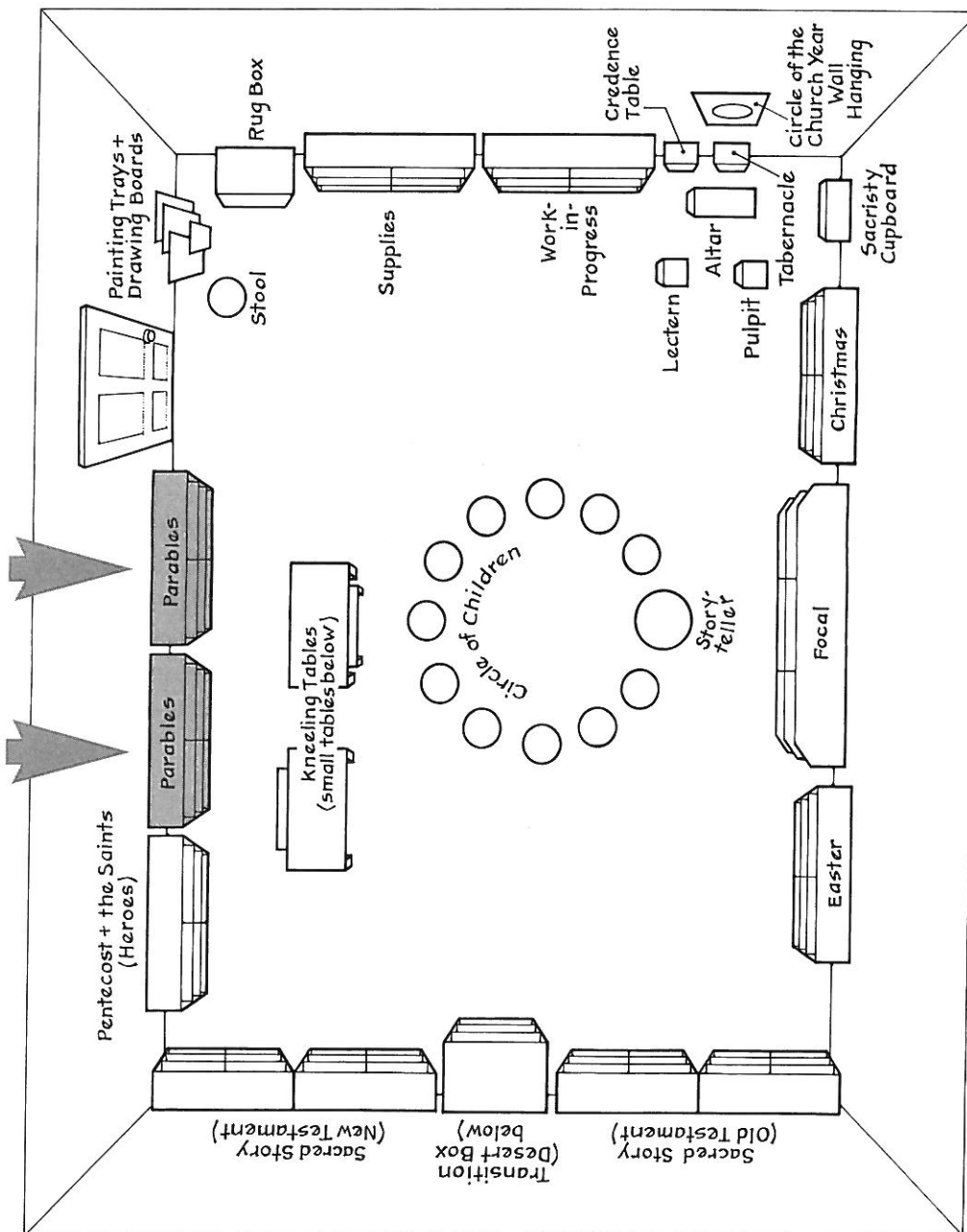
This parable is found in all three synoptic gospels and in Thomas (Matthew 24:32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19; Gospel of Thomas 20). The mustard in the parable is not the domestic mustard we use for flavoring. The mustard of the eastern world grew and spread quickly. Farmers did not like it because it could take over a field and ruin its useful production of grain. It is a shrub and not a tree. These historical matters are not interesting to children, but they are mentioned to invite the reader to discover more about this parable as an adult.

### NOTES ON THE MATERIAL

Find the material in a gold parable box with a yellow dot, located on the top shelf of one of the parable shelves. The underlay is yellow and shaped with the top a bit wider than the bottom. The sides are curved like a seed. The shape suggests a seed and more. There is a green shrub or tree made of felt to be unrolled. Birds and nests are kept in a separate small gold box with a lid. Finally, there is the figure of a person who puts the tiny seed in the ground.

## SPECIAL NOTES

**Tip:** Why tell parables? In parables, we enter with wonder to live the question. Parables question our everyday view of life. They wake us up to see in life what we have not seen before. Parables question the status quo, the order imposed by tradition, power or class. That is why Jesus' parables often got him into trouble, and why Christians ever since have sometimes redefined parables in ways that comfort us *only* rather than challenge us by disrupting our comfortable worldviews.



WHERE TO FIND MATERIALS

## MOVEMENTS

*Go to the parable shelf and pick up the parable box with the yellow dot on it. Point to the dot, but do not say anything to the children. Bring the parable box to the circle of children and place it in the middle. Sit down and become comfortable.*

*As you speak, pick up the box and look at it more closely.*

*Trace the outline of the box as you speak about its color and value.*

*Knock on the lid, like knocking on a door, when you note the difficulty of entering parables at times.*

*Hold the box out like a present.*

*When several or all of the introduction sentences are finished, sit for a moment. Let your authentic interest and love of parables be apparent.*

*Move the box from in front of you to your side. Remove the lid and lean it on the box so the children will not be distracted by looking inside. This also helps maintain a sense of mystery.*

*Take out the underlay and leave it for a moment crumpled in front of you. Then begin to smooth it out as you talk.*

*Hold your hand a few inches above the underlay. Push your hand down into the "color" that is there. Imply that the "yellow" has substance to it beyond the cloth. Invite the children to play with the idea of what the underlay could be.*

## WORDS

Watch where I go to get this material.

This box looks old. Parables are old. I wonder if there is a parable inside?

The box is the color gold. Parables are valuable, maybe even more valuable than gold.

Look, the box has a lid. I know, boxes have lids, but so do parables. Sometimes, even if you are ready, you cannot enter the parable. The lid is like a door. Sometimes it is closed. If that happens don't be discouraged. Come back to the parable again and again. One day it will open for you.

The box looks like a present. Parables are presents. They were given to you before you were born. Even if you do not know what a parable is, it has still been given to you.

I know what let's do. Let's look inside to see if there really is a parable there. I know they are easy to break, so let's be careful.

I wonder what this could be? I wonder if it could be a parable? It is certainly yellow.

There is nothing else here but yellow. I wonder what this could really be? Yes, I know it does look like a lemon.

I know, it could be the sun. I wonder what else it could really be?

## MOVEMENTS

*Take out the rolled up green felt tree and hide it inside your closed hand. While you are hiding it, keep eye contact with the children so they will look at you rather than at the material.*

*Look carefully into the box. There is nothing there to help get ready. The pieces left all have to do with the telling of the parable.*

*Take the person figure from the parable box. Place it at the edge of the underlay farthest from you, facing the children. The shrub will be planted there and grow "up" (from the children's perspective) toward you.*

*Hold up your closed hand that contains the "tree" and cover it with your other hand. Extend the first finger of the closed hand to show that you cannot see the seed. This kind of mustard seed comes in a pod and the individual seeds are like dust. You really could not see it.*

*Put your finger down into the underlay to plant the seed close to the farthest edge.*

## WORDS

■ A lemon drop? I wonder.

■ Let's see if there is anything else in here that can help us get ready.

Oh no, there isn't anything else! All we can do is begin.

There was once someone who said such wonderful things and did such amazing things that people followed him. As they followed him, they heard him speaking about a kingdom, but it was not like the kingdom they lived in. It was not like any kingdom they had ever visited. It was not even like any kingdom anyone had ever heard of.

They couldn't help it. They had to ask him. What is the kingdom of heaven like? One time when they asked him that he said, "The kingdom of heaven is like when a person..."

■ "...took the tiniest of all the seeds, a grain of mustard seed, a seed so small that if I had one on my finger you would not be able to see it."

■ "The person put the tiny seed in the ground, and it began..."

## MOVEMENTS

Inside your closed hand is the felt tree, so when you say “grow” you can begin to unroll it. Unroll it all the way to its top and then begin to extend the branches that were folded first, the last time you put the parable away.

Take the small gold box out of the parable box. Set it down on the underlay. Do not hurry. Remove the lid. Take a few of the birds out of the box, one at a time. Place them flying toward the tree.

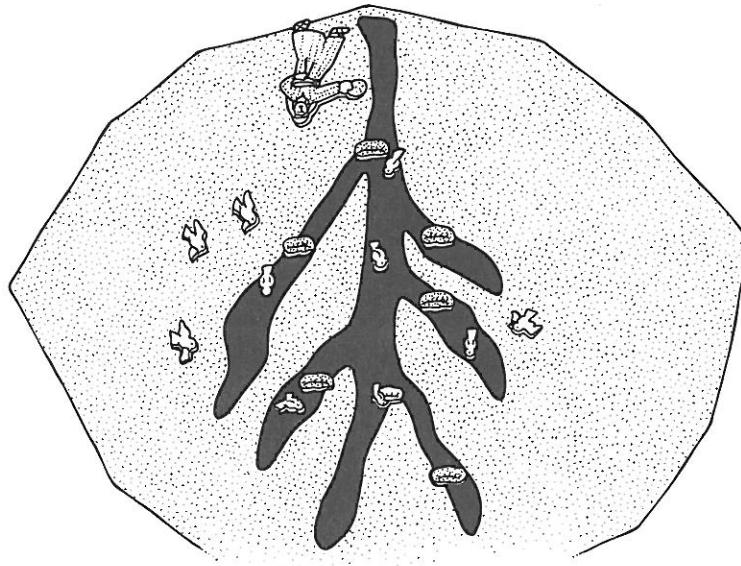
Take a few other birds from the box, one at a time, and place them around the tree. Take a few nests from the box, and place them in the branches of the tree.

## WORDS

“...to grow.”

“The shrub grew up so big it was like a little tree, and the birds of the air came...”

“...and they made their nests there.”



**THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED (STORYTELLER'S PERSPECTIVE)**

Sit back and enjoy the birds and the tree. If the children are well settled, you might pass around the box of birds and nests and invite the children to put birds and nests in places that are just right for them.

## MOVEMENTS

*When you are finished with the birds and nests, it is time to begin the wondering.*

*When the wondering draws to a close, begin to place the birds and nests back into the little box first, and then put the rest of the objects into the parable box itself. While you are putting things away, you might name the things again. This also is a good time to ask the children to begin to think about what work they will get out during the response time. The underlay goes in last.*

*Take the parable box back to the parable shelves, return to the circle and begin to help the children decide what work they will get out.*

## WORDS

■ Now I wonder if the person who put the tiny seed in the ground has a name?

I wonder if the person was happy to see the birds coming?

I wonder what the person was doing while the shrub was growing?

I wonder if the person could take the shrub like a tree and push it all back down inside the seed?

I wonder if the seed was happy while it was growing?

I wonder where the seed was when it stopped growing?

I wonder if the birds have names?

I wonder if they were happy to find the tree?

I wonder what the tree could really be?

I wonder if you have ever come close to this kind of tree?

I wonder what the nests could really be?

I wonder where this whole place could really be?