THE START OF SOMETHING BIG

There is nothing so big that it cannot say that it did not start from something small.

In James Michener’s classic historical novel, *Hawaii*, the great storyteller begins his tale at the beginning. The very beginning. He imagines the central Pacific without the islands of Hawaii. And postulates the tens of millions of years it took for these small masses of land to emerge. The volcanic activity of the ocean floor. The emerging mountains of molten rock. The descending glaciers of the ice age. And then finally the islands that emerged and remained above the oceanic waters. Michener then imagines how long it must have been – tens of thousands of years – before anything resembling life began to form on those volcanic islands. And he imagines the day when upon this barren rock lands a bird, some tropical bird which by the help of the Pacific wind currents – has drifted to these islands. From some previous vegetative feast this bird happens to bear inside a seed or two left over from the digestion of some exotic plant. The seeds are deposited and one manages to trickle down into some crevice where there is just enough soil into which it embeds. The rain and the sun do their part and the
seed germinates. A plant grows. Seeds form at the end of stalks. And the wind scatters the seed to other crevices. More germination. And what results over the next series of millennia are what we now know as the islands of Hawaii. To which I have never been, but they tell me it’s beautiful. A paradise, they say. A place where close to 7 million tourists make restorative pilgrimage every year. And all from a tiny seed.

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Subtract from your age the amount of years and days you’ve lived plus around nine months and what you have is the time when inside a woman’s body there floated about a zygote on its way to be imbedded within her uterine wall – the implanting of a seed (that’s how my mom explained it anyway – she called it a seed … she said I started as a seed. That sounds a lot better than zygote.) That it all began with a seed invisible to the naked eye – and the spirit of God – which resulted in the likes of me and the likes of you. It all began with a seed – the start of something big.

There is nothing so big that cannot say that it did not start from something small … something very small. It is the way it works.
So it makes all the sense in the world when Jesus gets talking about the kingdom of God – the kingdom of God, the vast, overarching kingdom of God, the all-encompassing kingdom of God – he tells us that kingdom of God in you and in me – is something that gets started with something very, very small. It’s something that gets started with a seed. It is the way life works. There is nothing so big that cannot say that it did not start from something small.

“The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet 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.”

And so the truth is … you and I are here today because somewhere along the way in some pocket of tilled and fertile soil within us – the seed of the kingdom fell and it took root. It germinated. It began to grow. And it has resulted in your sitting here in these pews. Hopefully, it has resulted in much more than that, but it has at least resulted in you sitting in these pews. Or maybe you are sitting in these pews in order that the seed of the kingdom might fall upon you and embed and take root and grow. The winds of the spirit have led you here and the seed of the kingdom is being scattered upon you. Regardless, the truth of our lives is – is
that we are beds of soil where small seeds are planted – that have potential to become something big.

Now this truth -- that we are all beds of soil where small seeds are planted that have potential to become something big -- this truth, like with all things in this broken world -- can be good news and it can be bad news.

Our souls – like any bed of soil – can grow good and bad.

Those of us who have any type of plant bed in and around our houses know this. The plant bed around my house has the potential of producing some amazingly beautiful flora. Lovely shrubs and plants – all that began with tiny seed. And at the same time this bed of soil as I discover each week has the potential of producing the undesirable. The things I don’t want. Weeds and grass and weeds and weeds. I pull them and discard them. But they keep coming back. The potential of good and bad … the seed of good and bad … exists within my flower bed. The rain falls on the just and the unjust plant – and both have the potential to become something big. Jesus calls this the wheat and the tares. They both grow up in the same garden. And the truth is … they both grow up in us.
We have the potential – all the small seed planted within us – have the potential to grow to become something big – bad or good – yet something big if we allow it.

I started reading a bit ago Richard Evan’s masterful three volume history of Germany’s Third Reich and in it he describes the background of many of the main characters in that dark time of history. One such character was Rudolph Hoss who “grew” to become the commandant of Auschwitz. And we all know the story of Auschwitz and the evil perpetrated there. But where did it begin? It began with a little boy Rudolph Hoss who was raised a devout Roman Catholic. He went to church every Sunday. The seed of the kingdom being planted. But the seed of evil that got planted in him – came when he had gone to confession and confessed a secret sin to the priest – but later the priest betrayed his confidence and told of the sin. Humiliation followed. The seed was planted. The young boy gave up his faith and a bad and destructive weed was allowed to grow.

There is, isn’t there, within each of us … the start of something big. Seeds are being planted all the time – and that can be good news and that can be bad news.
So we understand that when Jesus talks about the kingdom of God – he would have us look honestly at our lives and see the fact that our souls are soils – and that within each human heart is a fertile soil for the good and the bad seed. Anything can grow inside the human heart. And it doesn’t take much for something small to turn into something big.

You’ve had it happen to you. Maybe when you were a child you received a certain kindness from an adult – and it was that kindness that made you want to become kind. How many nurses have I talked to who said the reason they became a nurse was because as a child they had to be in the hospital and in that very scary and often painful place … a nurse came to the side of their bed and administered kindness and grace and healing. The small seed was planted and it grew to become something big.

Most of you know that I am one of three brothers to become pastors. And aside from the fact that it was the only work we could get – I attribute the origin of our pastoral callings – the dinner table where we sat, the three of us. Our pastor father at one end and our mother at the other. 99% of the dinners I ate I ate at that table with those two at either end … sewing seed … good seed. My dad was very busy pastor – but there he sat at that table every night. He made being a pastor look like a pretty good job. And he was right.
A dear friend of mine, a businessman, recounts how his early years of schooling were not
a time when he, should we say, applied himself – and he almost threw away his chances of
preparing for a career – but there was that one professor who took a chance on him and
admitted him into his program because he saw the potential of the soil. The seed was planted –
and not a week goes by that this now very successful entrepreneur does not look back and see
how the whole thing got started with the small seed of faith planted in his soul.

Small things become big things.

But we must be aware that it works the other way.

Remember the little seed of jealousy that drifted into your life. And it took root and it
caused you to do something so silly and stupid and shameful. It made you into something you
swore you would never become.

Or the little seed of anger that began to germinate in you a long time ago when a parent
slighted you or did worse to you. And you kept holding on to that anger. You did not pull that
weed from your garden. And it has grown and it has flowered and it has brought hurt upon so many within the reach of your branches?

Or the bitterness that has stemmed from some failure in your life that you are want to blame on someone else. “That if it hadn’t have been for so and so … of it hadn’t been for something that happened.” And so you “grow bitter” – and before you know it the bitterness has taken over the whole garden.

So what’s the point? Well, the point is that you and I have within us the start of something beautiful. Something big and beautiful. We have within us the start of the kingdom of God. And it begins with the word of grace that comes from the Father, through the Son and accompanied by the Holy Spirit. The seed of the kingdom. God is so eager to give it to us amidst all the other seeds that the world blows about. But it takes us drawing close to the sower. Coming into communion with the farmer who wishes to plant the harvest. To receive the broadcast of the seed from his hand. It means drawing close to those places where the seed is at hand – so that our chances grow of receiving it. That may not be in front of your TV. It may not be in the “coolest” of the crowds. It may not be with the people who are making the most money. It may be on your knees beside your bed in prayer. It may be in fellowship with
your brothers and sisters in Christ. It may be through the sweat and toil of a mission trip. It may be inside the pages of your Bible somewhere. Somewhere close to the sower.

Anthony de Mello tells the story about the farmer whose corn always took the first prize at the state fair and how he always had the habit of sharing his best corn seed with all the farmers in his neighborhood. When asked why he would let others have his prize seed he said, “It’s really a matter of self-interest. The wind picks up the pollen and carries it from field to field. So if my neighbors grow inferior corn, the cross-pollination brings down the quality of my own corn. This is why I am concerned that they plant only the best.”

It matters where you plant your field.

It matters where we plant ourselves from day to day. That where we place ourselves – where we direct our minds, our eyes, our thoughts, our emotions – it all matters. All sorts of seed are blowing about. And our souls are the soil. And small things become big things. It’s why I suppose the apostle Paul said writing from the dark dungeons of a Roman jail where your mind can wander to all sorts of conclusion, he writes, “… that whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things … and the God of peace will be with you.”

A good thing for us to consider on this Flag Day -- for we know deep down that the furling emblem means nothing – if, with the freedom it represents, we do not garden well the soil God has given us.

That the good seed might grow … and the bad seed might die … and that God’s small things … might become God’s big things.