

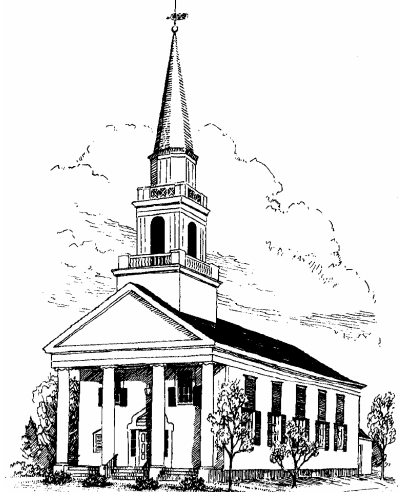
# Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

## Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from June 14, 2009

Rev. Ann M. Aaberg  
“The Little Things”

Scriptures:  
Ezekiel 17:22-24  
Mark 4:26-34



Because today is Children’s Worship Sunday, the people attending the 10:00 service will not hear these words which I am about to share with you. But *you* will not hear *their* Pastoral Prayer, which I’m going to offer based on the prayer requests of our children gathered during Sunday School last week.

I received 13 blue prayer request cards, just like the ones you are invited to share each week from the pews, prayer requests for:

- good weather for the summer
- to be healthy and strong
- for Todd in Afghanistan and his wife Amy
- for Stacey Herrman’s new cousins – the same premature twins for whom we’ve been praying
- for my Aunt Kathy and Uncle James who had a fire at their house
- for our Grandpa battling stage 4 lung cancer
- for my two aunts – thank you for watching over them
- for my Mom and Dad
- for my Mommy and Daddy
- and one with advice for Grandma—May you be able to talk to God while you’re frustrated or sad. He will help you work it out.
- Thank you, God, for protecting me in a storm
- And, finally, one from presumably our youngest writer, because as of yet, she hasn’t learned to write. Some lines and loops and a message from her teacher as to whose prayer it is.

I share these with you this morning, not only because they’re intended for the other service, not only because they are precious in their own right, but also because they are the same prayers we adults offer each week. Thanksgiving for the people we love and concern for those same people, pleas for protection for ourselves and others during difficult times, for healing from sickness and trauma, calls for renewed faith, and prayers that don’t have words, but we know God will hear them just the same.

But because these prayers are uttered by our little people, somehow they do hold a spe-

cial significance. They open a window for us into their tiny hearts and we find that despite our best attempts otherwise, their hearts do hold fear. But we also find in those hearts tremendous sensitivity, and trust and faith and gratitude and love and care. Yes, their parents have taught them well, but we're also witnessing God's grace: the seeds Jesus refers to this morning as being scattered on the ground and then we sleep and we rise night after night and day after day and they sprout and grow and we do not know how. Especially in this world, a post 9-11 world for many of our children, in this culture with all its emphasis on achievement and consumption, in this community with its nice homes and sailboats and the potential for our children to adopt an entitlement attitude, in spite of all those influences, we hear this morning their prayers to God for the people they love and, as Jesus says, this is what the kingdom of God is like. God at work in the seeds.

That may be why it's easier sometimes for us to recognize the kingdom of God in our children. They're closer to the ground. They're closer to the little things, the little things that we at the higher altitudes don't notice all the time, the little things that don't register with us because we're so involved with the big things.

There is a children's hymn that's a favorite of mine called "We've Got a Great Big Wonderful God" and that's true. We sang "How Great Thou Art" this morning. But sometimes in our gazing at the galaxies, or hearing the roll of thunder, or diving to the depths of the ocean, we focus on the expansive greatness of God and forget God's presence in the grain of sand, the drop of pond water, the mustard seed.

Julian of Norwich, a 14<sup>th</sup>-century mystic, who wrote "Revelations of Divine Love", described one of her many visions of God as follows:

*In this vision he showed me a little thing, the size of a hazelnut, and it was round as a ball. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought "What may this be?" And it was generally answered thus: "It is all that is made." I marvelled how it might last, for it seemed it might suddenly have sunk into nothing because of its littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: "It lasts and ever shall, because God loves it."*

So it is with little things. The handwritten card received for a birthday which holds so much more significance than the new wide-screen TV, the few carefully chosen words so much more memorable than the grand speeches, the wink from across the room, the brief touch on the shoulder or the pat on the elbow, the little things planted in our hearts and in our memories. These are the little words, the gestures, which are the indications of a love that looms very large. These teeny seeds which are given to us out of love to grow within us to give us the capability to sprout and to grow.

I remember being amazed and drawn in by a selection we read in French class in my senior year of high school. It was written by Blaise Pascal, an important mathematician who lived in the 1600s, but who was also a man-of-letters and a theologian. The selection I remember was his writing of the human's position between two infinities. On one hand, high and majestic Nature and the stars which roll through the firmament. So big and beyond, he said, that "no idea can come close to imagining it... It is the greatest sensible mark of God's omnipo-

tence, that our imagination loses itself in that thought.” But then he also offered to the human being the other extreme. I will read it to you now:

*... let him behold the tiniest things he knows of. Let a mite show him in the smallness of its body parts incomparably smaller, legs with joints, veins in the legs, blood in the veins, humours in the blood, drops in the humours, vapors in the drops, which, dividing to the smallest things, he wears out his imaginative power, and let the last object which he arrives at become now the subject of our discourse; he might think that this perhaps is the smallest thing in the universe. I wish now to make him see therein a new abyss. I want to paint for him not only the visible universe, but all the imaginable immensity of nature within the confines of an atom. Let him see an infinity of universes, in which each has its own firmament, planets, earth, in the same proportion as the visible world; within this earth, there are animals and finally, mites, in which he'll find again the same things as he found in the mite he started with; and finding again the same things without end, let him lose himself in these wonders, as shocking in their smallness as others are in their immensity; for who will not admire our body, which before was imperceptible within the universe, imperceptible itself within the bosom of nature, and which is now a colossus, a world, or rather a whole, in comparison to the nothing, the smallness, we can't arrive at?*

*Anyone who considers himself in this way will be seized with terror and, discovering that the mass nature has given him supports itself between two abysses of infinity and nothingness, he will tremble in the face of these marvels; and I believe that as his curiosity changes to admiration, he will be more disposed to contemplate them in silence than search them out with presumption.*

Jesus said: “With what can we compare the kingdom of God? It 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 shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

The following was recently found in the newsletter of the First Churches of Northampton, Massachusetts: The man whispered, “God, speak to me.” And a meadowlark sang, but the man did not hear. So the man yelled, “God, speak to me.” And the thunder rolled across the sky, but the man did not listen. The man looked around and said, “God, let me see you.” And a star shone brightly, but the man did not notice. Then the man shouted, “God show me a miracle.” And a life was born, but the man did not know it. So the man cried out in despair, “Touch me, God, and let me know You’re here!” So God reached down and touched the man, but the man brushed the butterfly away and walked on.

The little things. May we hear Jesus’ parable this morning with fresh ears: to hear the kingdom of God in the simple heartfelt words of children’s prayers. May we see the kingdom of God with fresh eyes this morning: to notice it in the smallest mite and feel it in the slightest shift in the breeze. May we speak and sing of the kingdom of God with fresh voices: full of awesome wonder and sprouting with tender love. Amen.

