

**“The Little Seeds that Can” - Rev. Jennifer Adams**  
**June 14, 2009 – Proper 6B**

Every now and then I start my sermon by cursing the lectionary gods because the lessons don't seem to fit at all. So, just to balance the record a bit, and in case appeasing those gods makes any difference in the long run -- this morning I'd like to offer my sincere thanks to them that today! Our gospel more than fits the celebration at hand. We could even say that what we celebrate today is the gospel lesson played out in real life, right here at Grace Church. In the gospel we just heard parables about tiny seeds growing into big things and today at Grace we're celebrating the nearly twenty three year history of our child care Center which is soon to launch at Maplewood School as Amazing Adventures Christian Learning Center.

Quick History: The Center began as a one-room infant care center in 1987 as the little seed that could – known at that point as the Grace Infant Care Center or ICC. In the first couple of years the Center was funded by Grace and received help getting off the ground from organizations like the Holland Community Foundation, Holland Hitch, Western Michigan Cursillo, Episcopal Church Women, United Way, Herman Miller and others. It was truly a broad undertaking. Various phases of change and growth included the addition of a toddler room, then a room for 3 & 4 year olds, and eventually an accredited preschool program and a name change to Grace Christian Child Care Center, or G4C. Eight Directors have served this Center and over time, the staff of four grew into what is now a certified staff of about twelve: professional teachers, a director and an assistant director. And the three infants who were the Center's very first clients of the ICC, are today the 23 year old ancestors of the hundreds of children who have attended and the over forty children who now attend the G4C. We celebrate that the kids now represent a true diversity in terms of ethnicity, race, and economic status and that over the last few years the Center has granted on average about \$50,000 per year in scholarship aid. This little seed that could has become an amazing example of what the opening collect called this morning a “ministry of compassion and justice” “to the least of these my brothers and sisters.” The mission established twenty three years ago to offer quality child care to all who seek it has remained consistent and has actually grown stronger. This launch will allow Amazing Adventures to double in size while they gain a playground, a gymnasium extra classrooms and become host to the area's first bilingual preschool.

So this ministry is this gospel story. Someone scattered seed on the ground, and the seed sprouted and grew. First the stalk, then the head, then the full grain. It was a tiny mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds yet it has become a great shrub with large branches for lots of little birds to nest in. And who knows, given a little more room and a little broader support base, one day Amazing Adventures just may become the greatest of all shrubs. And so, since the gospel story so obviously fits all of this so well, I could Thank you God and Amen and sit down. . . BUT I want to remind you of a couple of things first.

First we need to remember that this hasn't always been easy, this tending the seeds thing. There were months when the watering was extremely difficult and times when we weren't even sure whose turn it was to sprinkle. Even though Grace has given hundreds of thousands of dollars toward this ministry, there have been many years when funds ran below low and we considered

closing. And from the very beginning of this ministry there has been wrestling over how to configure our space in order to best serve all those whom we have been called to serve as church. Remember too that before the very beginning of the Center there were questions and struggles and disagreements that stemmed from challenges that came from beyond our walls. I want us to remember, not only for the sake of history but also for the sake of courageous visioning that while daycare centers are popular and even competitive now. . .when Grace started this ministry it was a tremendous and very unpopular risk in the larger community. Holland needed infant care because nobody else would provide it, at least publically and openly. Much of Holland and nearly all of the churches in Holland at that time felt that mothers should not have a calling, a career outside of the home. Offering good and safe care for infants gave women and families that option and it wasn't a popular option to give, let alone by a Church. The ICC was referred to by many as an "un-Christian" ministry because it allowed for mothers who needed or wanted to work to work. But 23 years ago and 22 years ago and 21 one years ago and 20 years ago, Grace stood her ground, because this congregation and its leadership believed the seeds under their feet needed tending and deserved care. This congregation believed and believes that caring for infants and children was and is helping families to be healthy and faithful. And as much as growing and expanding and launching is worth celebrating today, so is this congregations risky "holding our ground". The irony of course is that today some of the biggest competition in the daycare scene comes from the Christian Reformed Churches. And I kind of love that. Without even knowing it our tending the seeds was also planting some others. Something unimaginable when all of this began. The point of this kind of remembering of course, is to help us be aware now that mission is not always easy or popular but sometimes Grace Church the little seed that can is called to get behind something and lead the larger community of Holland into courageous, just and compassionate new Christian ministries.

But in order to do that it takes a whole lot of people. And I want to take a minute or two with that piece also. Would current Directors and staff of the G4C please stand. And now your families. Would current Board members stand. Current Grace Church Vestry. Grace staff. Children, youth and young adults who attended the Center? Would members of our Buildings and Grounds and Outreach Commission stand, current and any who has served on these commission over the last 23 years? Would former Directors and staff please stand? (I think there are a few of you here and we've received letters and gifts from others who couldn't be here today.) Would anyone who has ever served on the Center's Board or a Task force of the child Care Center stand? Vestry members from the last 23 years? Anyone who has volunteered for a rummage sale or a clean up day or bought something through an Infant Care or G4C fundraiser. Anyone who is here today helping us pray this ministry forward. OK, so now, unless you are withholding your prayers this morning, I'm pretty sure that's all of us. Look around. And know that there are hundreds not here today who would be standing too. It takes this many and more to make a ministry like this fly and fly well. As Amazing Adventures moves forward we wish you this kind of support and more. And as we take steps as a community of faith into new vision and mission remember this. Everyone in the room is standing because they touched this ministry in some way. It takes all of us to keep ministries alive and well. Especially over the course of this one which lived here in this building for approximately 5556 days. OK you can sit.

Finally we need to remember and to celebrate that all of this is about God's reign, that's what the parable says. It's about growing the kinds of things and the kind of people that serve and build

and take risky, compassionate stands for just. It's about growing in our abilities to love the children, youth, young adults and adults whom we have been given to love. It's not always easy, but the seeds are holy and that's what matters. The seeds are God's. And we give thanks as we bless forward Amazing Adventures and we pray that all of us may continue to help the gospel come to life right here, right now as the little seeds that can.