

# The parable of the mustard seed

## Theme

Big things can come from small beginnings

## Suggested PSHE learning outcome

- KS1:** 1b) sharing opinions on things that matter to us and explaining our views  
 2e) realizing that people and other living things have needs, and that we have responsibilities to meet them
- KS2:** 1a) talking and writing about opinions, and explaining views on issues that affect ourselves and society  
 1c) facing new challenges positively by collecting information, looking for help, making responsible choices, and taking action

## Bible reading

In the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus likened the family of God to a tiny mustard seed that grows and grows.

What is God's kingdom like? What story can I use to explain it? It is like what happens when a mustard seed is planted in the ground. It is the smallest seed in all the world. But once it is planted, it grows larger than any garden plant. It even puts out branches that are big enough for birds to nest in its shade.

MARK 4:30–32

Perhaps today's story could be...



## The animal sanctuary

It all started with just one injured pigeon—and one small idea to help other creatures.

Meera spotted the pigeon lying in the gutter. 'Oh, you poor thing,' she cried, bending down to it. 'I bet you've been hit by a car.'

The pigeon blinked at her as she gently picked it up. At least it was still alive.

'My next-door neighbour knows a lot about birds and animals,' said Meera. 'I'll take you to her.'





Mrs Frazer gently took the pigeon from Meera. It seemed unable to move and lay perfectly still in her hands, watching her with black, beady eyes. She quickly examined it, carefully pulling each wing out in turn to see if either of them was broken.

‘I can’t find anything wrong with it,’ she told Meera. ‘I think it’s just stunned. But we can’t release it like this, so I’ll keep it for a day or two until it recovers.’ She laid the pigeon in a box lined with straw and put it in her garden shed.

When Meera went to visit the pigeon the next day, it was sitting up in its box but it wouldn’t eat anything.

The next day, however, the pigeon was up and about and was perched on a large box of lawn seed. Mrs Frazer told Meera that it had eaten quite a bit of corn and drunk some water. ‘We’ll probably be able to release it tomorrow,’ she said.

‘You’re really good with birds and animals,’ said Meera, remembering the motherless ducklings that Mrs Frazer had adopted in the spring, the fox with the injured leg she’d helped, and the two stray cats she’d taken in.

‘I love looking after them,’ said Mrs Frazer.

‘Have you ever thought of starting an animal

sanctuary?’ asked Meera.

‘Many times,’ smiled her neighbour, ‘especially as there isn’t one anywhere near here. But it takes a lot of money to care for animals properly and I’m afraid I couldn’t possibly afford it.’

‘I’d help you raise the money,’ said Meera.

Mrs Frazer chuckled. ‘Oh, I know you mean well, dear. And it’s very kind of you to offer, but you’re just a child.’

Meera thought about it on the way to school the next day. She didn’t see why being ‘just a child’ should put her off. She decided to start trying to raise some money.

‘I’ll make up a collecting box and start the fund off with this week’s pocket money,’ she said. ‘At least it will be a start.’

At school, she told her two friends Nicola and Seth how she wanted to raise money to help Mrs Frazer start an animal sanctuary. They both thought it was a good idea.

‘Perhaps we could start a sort of supporters’ group,’ Meera suggested.

‘Yes, and maybe we could give a sticker to everyone who gives a donation,’ said Seth.

‘I could make stickers on our computer,’ said Nicola. ‘We’ve got some sheets of labels that would be just right.’

‘Great idea,’ said Meera. ‘You could print I SUPPORT THE WESTFIELD ANIMAL SANCTUARY on them.’

‘Brilliant. I’ll run some off tonight,’ said Nicola. ‘And I’ll tell my two cousins who are coming at the weekend about it. I’m sure they’ll want to help.’

‘And I’ll tell Kemi and Rob,’ said Seth. ‘They love animals, so they’re bound to want to join us.’

‘Tell everyone you know,’ said Meera. ‘And ask them to tell their friends and neighbours.’

It was surprising how quickly the word spread. Everyone they told went on to tell someone else. Soon half of the people living in Westfield were wearing supporters’ stickers. Mrs Frazer was delighted when money started to come in.

Along with donations of money came three orphaned baby hedgehogs, a blackbird with a broken wing and a Canada goose with fishing-line tangled round its legs.

Mrs Frazer set to work, clearing out her shed and constructing cages for the animals. The sanctuary was up and running.

‘We’ve got to keep the money coming in now,’ said Meera.

They made posters about the sanctuary, which they put up around the town, and they also printed some leaflets to hand out.

Then they organized a sale of old toys and books, which they decided to hold in Seth’s parents’ garage. Word soon spread round the neighbourhood and boxes of donated toys and books were soon piling up.

The sale made £156 and created even more interest in the animal sanctuary. Nicola had to run home and print off some more supporters’ stickers.

Mrs Frazer bought another second-hand shed with the money, and some wire to make outside runs.

The following week, the school made the sanctuary their ‘special cause’ at their annual fête. The fête turned out to be the most

successful they had ever held, and the proceeds enabled Mrs Frazer to purchase another shed and more cages. There would also be enough money to keep the sanctuary running for some time.

One of the schoolchildren had taken her aunt along to the fête. The aunt told her cousin about the sanctuary, and he told his friend who was a reporter on the local paper. The reporter wrote a full-page feature about the sanctuary and, as the newspaper covered several local towns, news of the animal sanctuary reached more and more people.

Now things really snowballed. More money was sent in and a vet offered his services free of charge once a week. Several people rang up and said they would help to feed the animals and clean out the cages. Then a local farmer offered the use of some of his land so that they could expand the sanctuary.

‘I can’t believe how well you’ve done,’ Mrs Frazer told Meera. ‘From just a small idea we’ve now got this wonderful big animal sanctuary, and lots of needy animals and birds will be given help and shelter because of it.’

Meera smiled happily and stroked the little muntjak deer that was recovering from being hit by a car. ‘I just told a couple of friends and they each told a couple more people,’ she said. ‘It was amazing how the idea just grew and grew.’

## Reflections

Big things can come from small beginnings. Just like the tiny mustard seed, Meera's idea grew and grew. God's word is like a tiny seed. As we spread his word of love, and others hear it and continue it, his family grows and grows.

## Suggested questions for discussion

- ❖ What other plants can you think of that start from a tiny seed like the mustard?
- ❖ What is the best good idea you have ever had, that you'd like to pass on to your friends?
- ❖ The word of God is spread not only by passing on the message verbally. We can pass the message on by the way we behave—particularly towards others. What examples can you think of?

## Follow-on questions for older children

- ❖ What do you think is the main similarity between the parable of the mustard seed and the story, 'The animal sanctuary'?
- ❖ Meera obviously felt very strongly about the need for an animal sanctuary in her area. How would you have felt in a similar situation? Would you have been put off because you were only a child and it was a very big thing that you wanted to do?
- ❖ What can we learn from the expression 'Big things can come from small beginnings'? What other ways can you think of to explain it?

## Classroom activities

### The miracle of growth

Plant a seed to witness the miracle of growth, and observe how caring for it will help it to grow.

For a quick result, sow mustard and cress seed on blotting paper or flannel. The mustard plant obviously won't be the same size as the one in the Bible story but

it still grows to be much bigger than the seed we plant.

If it is spring, you could plant a sunflower seed or a bean and watch how something large and impressive can grow from one small seed.

### 'Grow' your own class tree

#### You will need:

- \* A large piece of paper to stick your tree on
- \* A leaf for each child in the class (cut from the template on page 110)
- \* Glue
- \* String or a brown coloured pencil or felt-tipped pen

Get each child to colour in their leaf and write their name on it. Then, starting with one leaf and working on the principle that each child passes 'the word' on to two others, help the children to stick their leaves on to the large piece of paper.

Join the leaves together by sticking on pieces of string or drawing in branches with the brown coloured pencil or felt-tip.

See how quickly your tree grows.



## Assembly time

# Growing a living class tree

### CAST

One announcer  
One storyteller  
One seed  
Two children to be branch 'B's  
Four children to be branch 'C's  
Eight children to be branch 'D's

The rest of the children in the class can be birds.

*The announcer stands on one side of the stage and the storyteller stands on the other side.*

**Announcer:** In the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus likened the family of God to a tiny mustard seed. When it grows, it becomes the biggest of plants and its branches provide shade for the birds to rest under. We are going to grow a class tree to show how the family of God grew and grew.

*The seed walks to centre stage.*

**Storyteller:** *(Child's name)* is the tiny seed.

*The seed crouches down as small as he / she can.*

**Storyteller:** Our seed begins to grow.



*The seed looks up and slowly spreads arms upwards and outwards. Both branch 'B's come on and sit just behind and on either side of the seed.*

**Storyteller:** *(Child's name)* passes the word on to two friends.

**Seed:** *(Turning to one branch 'B')*  
Have you heard the news?

*First branch 'B' bends to listen, then sits up again. The action is repeated with the second branch 'B'. Then both the 'B' branches sit up tall and slowly spread their arms upwards and outwards.*

**Storyteller:** They listened.

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*The four 'C' branches come on and kneel up just behind and to either side of each branch 'B'.*

**Storyteller:** And they told others.

*Each 'B' branch says, 'Have you heard the news?' to two of the 'C' branches, as the seed did. Each 'C' branch bends to listen, then they all kneel up tall and spread their arms upwards and outwards.*

*The eight 'D' branches come on and stand just behind and to either side of each 'C' branch.*

**Storyteller:** As the word is spread, our tree, like God's family, grows and grows.

*Each 'C' branch says, 'Have you heard the news?' to two of the 'D's. All the 'D' branches listen and then stand up tall, holding their arms out. The birds run on, flapping arms for wings.*

**Storyteller:** Then the birds came to rest in the shade of the branches.

*The birds 'fly' over and squat down under the children's outstretched arms.*

**Announcer:** Big things can come from small beginnings. God's word is like a tiny seed. As we spread his word of love, and others hear it and continue it, God's family grows and grows.