

A Ministry of Small Things

Luke 16:10-13

From the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois

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I'd like to begin this three-point sermon with a pointed question: What's a small thing you've done the make a positive difference in somebody's life?

The answer is, you can't know. You don't know a small thing you've done to make a positive difference in somebody's life because it was a *small thing*. We forget small things. We value and remember the BIG things. I put ten kids through college. I played in the Super Bowl. Big things. We remember them. We think the big things are important. We value them. We spend \$75 buying somebody roses: that's kind of a colorful, fragrant, big deal.

We're taught to think big.

I was at Costco once. I found a 100-gallon container of pimento cheese. I asked a person who worked there, "Do you have this in a smaller size?" He said to me—no kidding—"This is Costco. Go Big or Go Home."

We value the big things.

And we don't notice the small things. Our warehouse mindset notices the Sequoia, but we don't notice the Sequoia seed. We send a complimentary, three-word email to somebody without hardly thinking. That's a small thing. In a passing exchange at the mall, we are momentarily kind to some stranger who really, really, really needs a little kindness. We do it and we don't notice what we do. We don't remember it. It's a small thing. It's no big deal.

Except that it is.

Small kindnesses matter. They add up. Small things are a big deal.

You've heard this story before. A young college professor has Big Plans for her career. She's going to do that ground-breaking research; she's going to write that important book. She looks back at the end of her career and asks herself, *What have I done? What do I have to show for my work?* She didn't write the book. She didn't accomplish the ground-breaking research. Instead, she taught her subject, and subjected herself to countless office hours with students; tutoring them; helping them launch their plans; giving vocational guidance. A million small interruptions followed by a million more marked her career.

She chides herself in the looking back. She didn't accomplish her life's work. She had too many student-interruptions.

A colleague tells her, *your students were your life's work. And those interruptions were at the heart of that work. Forty-some-odd years of small things added up. Caringly tending the "interruptions" was your vocation.*

Small things do matter.

We are taught to keep our eye on the prize. We are taught not to major in the minors. Don't get bogged down in the weeds, we say. Don't let the small things get in the way of the big things. This may be right, and in another context, this idea of focusing on the big thing might win the day and in another sermon be the point.

But the small things do matter. They add up. Any coach will say the basics are important. Practice the small stuff.

Jesus says if you're faithful in small things, you'll be faithful in big things. If you're dishonest in small things, you'll be dishonest in big things.

The small things matter. The tiny mustard seed when nurtured and watered and drenched in sun will grow into something useful. Remember, it started small.

The journey around the world begins with the first, single step. That's a cliché. I know it. So is this: The alcoholic doesn't have to stay sober forever, he simple has to stay sober today, one day at a time.

What's a small thing you've done the make a positive difference in somebody's life? You don't have to remember. Don't bother trying. Instead, just remember that God uses our small efforts, our small contributions—and they matter. Be kind to others. Hold the door open for a stranger. Say hello to the neighbor walking her dog past your driveway. Spend just sixty-seconds more listening to your neighbor talk about her day. Give just 6-percent more of your time caring for your flower beds; it'll make you a much better person.

I'm not talking about big stuff. I'm not talking about donating a kidney—though that's beautiful and good. Today, I'm talking about smaller things. I'm talking about giving each other the time of day.

I said there were three points to this sermon: Point #1: Small things matter. Be faithful in the small things. Point #2: Small things matter. Be faithful in the small things. Point #3: Small things matter. Be faithful in the small things.

To God be all glory forever!

AMEN.

Luke 16:10-13 (Good News Translation)

10 Whoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in large ones; whoever is dishonest in small matters will be dishonest in large ones.