**A Story about Trustworthiness, the Courage to Admit Failure, and Leadership.**

             Throughout the Bible, we find God choosing seemingly unimportant people for important tasks.  Moses had run away from Egypt and spent 40 years tending sheep in the desert when God called him lead his people out of slavery.  King David was the youngest son of his father, and when the Priest Samuel asked to see all of Jesse’s sons, no one thought to bring David in from the work he was doing.  The Prophet Jeremiah responded to God’s call by saying, “I don’t know how to speak.  I am too young!” (Jeremiah 1:6, Good News Translation).

            None of us would have chosen Moses, David, or Jeremiah for a leadership position, but God did.  This is an important message for our young men.

             You can begin a meditation by talking about Moses, or David, or Jeremiah, and then telling the story of “The Emperor’s Seeds.”

             If the Troop or Crew is composed entirely of people from Christian denominations, another good scripture passage is Philippians 2:5-11.  Biblical scholars believe that in this passage, St. Paul is quoting an early Christian hymn.  It is a poem that speaks of Jesus being nothing, “not counting equality with God a thing to be grasped, but instead emptied himself . . .” until God raised him up.

             In any case, throughout history the great leaders have been trustworthy and brave, and have spent their lives working for others.

             Here is a story that brings together the “Trustworthy” and “Brave” points of the Scout law.  It is apparently a traditional Chinese folk tale.  There are several versions of it available on the internet. Richard Davies has rewritten it and, among other things, used “western” names.

 “The Emperor’s Seeds”

            Once upon a time in a far-off land, there was an elderly king.  He was a good and wise king, and the people of that country were glad to be under his rule, but everyone knew that he was very old, and they worried about what would happen to the government after the king died.  He had no children, and even if he had, it was not likely that they would be as wise as the king.

             Since the king was wise, he also knew that he wouldn’t live forever, and that the people would need a good ruler after he died.  He thought about the problem for quite a while, and then he made an announcement to the entire kingdom.

            He announced that he was going to hold a contest, and that the contest would be open to all of the youth of the kingdom, both young men and young women.  Whoever won the contest would become the new ruler.  The wise king himself would be the judge of the contest.

            On a certain day, late in winter, just before spring planting time, all of the young men and young women of the kingdom were to come to the palace.  When they arrived, each one was given one seed and some simple instructions.  The instructions said that they were to plant the seed and take care of it throughout the summer.  In the fall, at harvest time, each of them were to bring their plants to the fair where they would be displayed for everyone to see.  The king would come to the fair and decide who had done the best job of tending his or her seed.  The youth who had done the best job would be trained to become the new king or queen.

            One of the young people who was given a seed was a fellow we will call “Luke.”  Luke was a good student at school, and he was pretty popular, but he was also a guy who took his responsibilities seriously.  So when he got his seed, he went into the woods and found some really good rich soil.  He sifted the soil to get rid of any seeds and weeds that were in it, so he ended up with a big pot of pure, rich dirt.  Then he mixed in some fertilizer, and he planted his seed.  He put the pot in a south window to make sure it would get good sunlight, and he watered it regularly.

            Pretty soon Luke’s friends started talking about the plants they were growing.  They were pretty excited, and some of them were sure they would win the contest.  They began bragging about the good things they would do for the kingdom when they became the ruler.  All of this talk made Luke feel really bad, because nothing was growing in his pot.

He couldn’t figure out what he had done wrong.  He put more fertilizer in the pot and watered it more frequently.  As the summer went on, he moved the pot several times a day to make sure it was always in the direct, warm sun.  He even prayed for his seed.  Still, nothing grew.  His friends talked more and more about their plants, and when they asked Luke how his plant was doing, he didn’t know what to say.  He found every possible excuse to avoid seeing his old friends.

Finally summer was over and it was time for the fair.  Luke told his parents that he wasn’t going.  His parents sat down and talked with him, and told him that he had to go, even with a pot full of nothing but dirt.  They said that by going to the fair he would learn a lesson about how we handle ourselves when things are not going well.  It’s easy to meet other people when everything in our life is going right, but it’s difficult to meet people when things are going wrong.  They said that it would be good for Luke to learn this difficult skill.

Luke didn’t want to go to the fair.  He really didn’t want to go, but he knew that he should obey his parents, and he saw the wisdom in their advice, so he went.

When he got there, he found hundreds . . . no . . . he found thousands of beautiful plants.  All sorts of plants.  Every kind of vegetable, every kind of flower, tree seedlings, there were even trees that had grown so well that they looked like they were several years old.  Luke wondered how anyone had managed to grow such big young trees in just one summer.

The plants were on long tables, and on the tables there was a space marked for every young person in the kingdom.  Luke carried in his pot of dirt, found his space, and placed the pot there.  He felt like everyone was looking at him and his pot and maybe he was right.

In a little while there was a trumpet sound that announced the king’s arrival.  Without saying anything, the king started walking up and down the aisles between the tables full of plants.  He walked rapidly, and didn’t appear to look at any of the beautiful plants.  Then  he came to Luke’s pot and stopped.

He stopped, looked at Luke, and frowned.  “Young man, why did you just bring a pot of dirt to the fair?  Didn’t you try to grow a plant?” he asked.

Luke didn’t know what to say.  He stuttered, and tried to explain.

The king reached into the pot and picked up a handful of dirt.  The king felt of the dirt.  The king sniffed the dirt.  He asked Luke where the dirt had come from.  He asked Luke several more questions, and then turned and continued on his march through the aisles among the plants.

After he had walked past all of the plants, the king went to the platform and announced to the audience, “I have made a decision.  We have a winner of the contest.  By God’s good will, we have a young person qualified to train to become the next ruler of this kingdom.”  He then called Luke’s name.  Luke didn’t hear, because he wasn’t listening to the speech.  He didn’t care who won.  All he knew was that he had lost.

The king called Luke’s name again, and someone nudged Luke and said, “Get up there.  He wants to talk to you.  Maybe you’re in trouble.”

Luke went up to the king, and the king said, “Several months ago, I gave each of you a seed, told you to plant it, and bring the results to the fair.  Most of you did not show me that you can be trusted with such a simple task, because you did not do what I asked you to do.  Now I will tell you that before I gave you the seeds, I personally boiled them so that they would not grow.  It is clear to me that most of you did not plant the seed I gave you, but you exchanged it for another seed.

“Anyone who is going to serve as the ruler of this country must be trustworthy in all things, no matter how small.  You see, a ruler is really a servant whose job is to be helpful to all the people of the kingdom, and sometimes this is very difficult, and sometimes the ruler will fail, and in those times the ruler must demonstrate personal courage by being truthful with all the people.  In response the people will not only trust the ruler, but the people will themselves become trustworthy with each other.  That is the way to have peace and good government in the kingdom.

“Therefore, I present to you a young person who has demonstrated both trustworthiness and courage.  He planted the seed I gave him, and he had the courage to come here among all of you with nothing but a pot of dirt.  Today he has shown himself worthy to be the future ruler of this kingdom.”