

## Mark 4:26-34

<sup>26</sup>He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, <sup>27</sup>and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. <sup>28</sup>The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. <sup>29</sup>But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

<sup>30</sup>He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? <sup>31</sup>It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; <sup>32</sup>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.”

<sup>33</sup>With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; <sup>34</sup>he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

### Seeds and Weeds

June 24, 2018

I can't think of a more appropriate time of the year to hear this parable of seeds and weeds. All you have to do is look out the window and see everything has burst into glorious green and growth. I feel like I'm cutting grass every other day. We even have this weed growing on our property that is taking over everything! And I have no idea how it got there or where it came from! Sometimes parables come to life right in front of our eyes.

And I just love parables! I'll just say that out loud! I love them. They spark my creativity and sometimes just carry me away as they lead to other questions and themes. And like all parables they give us insights into how God works in the world and how we share in that glorious work as we live faithful lives of love and service. I hope you feel the same way.

The parables that Jesus shares this morning are the last two parables about seeds in Mark's gospel. You'll recall that in the beginning of this chapter Jesus talks about the sower who sows seeds everywhere; on the path, on the rocks, on good soil and bad soil. The *indiscriminate sower* is how I think of him. He just keeps throwing seeds on the earth in the hope that something will grow. And then Jesus moves on to talk about light under a bushel, and then to these two parables about seeds and the kingdom. How seeds are sown and grow on their own, and how the mustard seed which is so small, and yet becomes a bush big enough for birds to find shelter. This is like the kingdom of God. Planting seeds and then waiting. Getting up each and every day doing what you always do. Living, working, eating, playing, getting up and going to bed. Being faithful. You don't really have any control over the seeds that you planted; they are just doing what they do in their own time.

Pastor Betty Long shared this childhood story where she says, “When I was a child, life was not easy. My dad worked two jobs to try and support my mom and me so that we could buy a home, have nice clothes and enough to eat. He wasn't home very much, and when he was home he was usually sleeping because he was so tired. I never really got to spend any time with my dad until I was grown up.

My mom worked hard, too. She didn't have a job but she was always busy cleaning and cooking, and when I was six years old my mother had a baby and another arrived thirteen months later. Then she was incredibly busy and didn't have much time left over for me. I felt pretty lonely.

One day I went for a walk, by myself as usual, and I went by the church. In those days the church rectory was next door to the church and as I passed by I saw my minister out in the yard digging. I walked over to him to say "hello" and he put down his shovel, sat down in the grass and began talking to me. He didn't talk at me, he

didn't give me a sermon, he just sat with me and listened to me talk. He asked me all about school and my life in general. We must have sat and talked like that for at least an hour. He did not know it, but those few moments with him changed me. For the first time in my life, I felt like I was special. I felt worthy of having someone listen to me, I felt treasured and cared about. My minister had no idea how much those few moments meant to me. But that day so long ago, he had planted a seed within me. It didn't sprout up overnight, but it grew, gradually, into a sense of being called to ministry." (Nourishing Seeds, Betty Long, Christian Globe Networks, Inc.)

Now I like to think of this as the kind of evangelism we are supposed to be doing. Living lives that reflect a Loving God. Listening, caring, looking for all the ways that God is already present. This is something we've discussed before. We like to think that building the Kingdom is about what we do, and that is partly true. But the real work belongs to the Spirit of God which is already way ahead of you. The real work of evangelism is paying attention to where God is inviting you to get on board!

I happened to be watching one of my favorite movies while I was taking a few days off last week. It was *Eat Pray Love*, starring Julia Roberts. There is a scene where she is in a holy place in India, where she suddenly says out loud, "God dwells in me, as...me!" God dwells in us and is expressed as us! We are all imbued with the Holiness of God, like it or not! Didn't God say, I put my spirit within you? I wrote my laws upon your heart? God dwells within you. You are Holy! Beth, You are Holy! Kenny, You are Holy! Diane, You are Holy! Did you know that about yourselves? You may not recognize that, or let it be revealed in your daily life, but non-the-less, it is there. We don't know how the seeds grow but we know who plants them. And perhaps the goal of a faithful life is to reveal more and more of what is Holy within us as we live our lives moving ever closer to God and one another until we come to the end of it all. A work that continues even after death, I think. It reminds me of that song we like to sing that goes, "*Lord make us more Holy, Lord, make us more Holy. Lord make us more Holy, until we meet again. Holy, Holy, Holy, until we meet again.*"

There is holiness in each and every person on this planet and our call is to try and see that, and respond to it, and to help it grow, not necessarily to make it happen.

I've been reading a wonderful book by Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt, who was a German Lutheran pastor living in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He died in 1919. The name of the book is, *Everyone Belongs to God*, and I highly recommend you read it. In it he says the following, "Don't forget that whatever good you may find within yourself must also be hidden in other people. So never despise those around you in whom this goodness has not yet come to light. Believe in the people, even in those whose ideas and ways of life are completely the opposite of your own. Accept them as you do yourself. If you have faith, not only in God but in what lies buried within each person, then they will have faith too. If you seek God alone, then that which is from God in others will come alive, whether or not you can see it. Jesus sees what is of God in others, even if it is still hidden as a tiny seed.

This is the gospel you must proclaim. Preach it simply. Jesus values each person; he sees their dignity as God created them. He came to rid every person of shame and self-contempt, of the feeling that they are nothing and can do nothing, the feeling that they have ruined everything, and nothing can change that, the feeling that all is hopeless. He came to assure the disheartened that they can still be reborn. Resurrection is possible again and again, in spite of all our weakness and sin, even if our bodies should perish.

There remains a precious jewel in every person, which is stronger than any outward pressure in their lives. It remains inviolable, even in those who feel that they are lost in their rottenness. No matter how badly they have ruined their lives, this jewel remains in them; it is as certain as that God was reconciling the world to himself in Jesus Christ. there is something in each person that will never be lost, something that can always be

resurrected. That is the gospel.” (Everyone Belongs to God. Christoph Blumhardt (1842-1919) published by Plough Publishing House 2015)

How are you seeing yourself in these parables? What resonates with you? Are you one who plants seeds, one who recognizes when others are growing in God? Are you growing like the mustard seed into a bush where others can take shelter in the shade of God’s love? I think we all can look around and see that we live in a troubled world. That our human nature is not always in alignment with God’s love and we often hurt one another. I’m not sure how we break this pattern except by God’s Grace. I know many of us feel the pain that our nation and world is going through as we line up on one side or another of any particular issue. It can be terribly discouraging and heartbreaking. And I wonder how we can make a difference not only for the world, not only in our homes right here, but for the Kingdom.

Well this week I encourage you to look for where seeds have already been planted. Where God is saying, “Hey, over here! Something has come up over here and I want you to share this with me. Or hey, would you call your neighbor and let them know they are loved? Would you listen to a stranger tell you their story as you pass each other in the grocery store? Would you please be kind to one another and give each other room to grow? Would you remember that Love bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things, holds all things as precious?”

Pastor Janet Hunt says, “Take a look around your congregation and your community to see where life is springing up. Get close enough to marvel at what God is already doing without your help. And then try to catch up to it.”

Or, maybe, just maybe, take some time this week to sit in the shade of God’s mustard bush Love! His Kudzu Love is what I call it, where he is building nests and shelter for the Kingdom. A wild and crazy bush that will eventually take over the whole world. Love will conquer all! Just you wait and see. That is the promise of God!

The Kingdom of God just keeps growing and inching its way into soil both fertile and unfertile, doing what it does, changing lives, even before we are aware of it, even without our assistance. But when we see it, we should rejoice! Rejoice I say! Just as a farmer rejoices that the grain is ripe, and the harvest is at hand. The tomatoes are ready, the corn is plump, the strawberries are red and waiting...Gather them in! Bring them Home! Open wide the gates! For they all belong to God and are part of this glorious Kingdom, our sisters and our brothers! Thanks be to God. Amen.