

Sermon

Proper 6B June 16, 2024

Mark 4:26-34

Today we have a couple of agricultural parables from Jesus. In a time when most people were closely tied to agriculture, these parables probably made the most sense out of all of Jesus' parables. And even today, especially in areas where farming is a big part of life, these parables are more easily understood than some others.

His first parable is about a farmer who scatters seed, and then basically lives his life not knowing how the seed transforms and grows until it is time to be harvested. Even today when we have a better understanding of this process, it's probably still a mystery to most of us. This is why Jesus uses this as a resurrection parable - "unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it will not live."

The second parable is the famous mustard seed. There have been lots of discussions and sermons over the years pointing out that the mustard seed really isn't the smallest seed, nor does it grow to become the largest of all shrubs. But parables aren't meant to be factual as much as they are designed to represent a larger truth. And the larger truth of this parable is that no matter how small an idea or dream is, if it is dreamed and pursued in faith it will grow larger than you ever thought possible. The most obvious example in our collective lives is the Food Pantry, which started by handing out sack lunches to those who needed one (a very small seed) and grew into the operation we have today (a place with large branches helping many people).

Sowing seeds is a radical act of faith. We put something in the ground, we hope it grows into something magical, and we look forward to living with resurrection results.

These parables today are pointing out larger truths of our faith and our lives as disciples. The questions we need to ask ourselves are these:

What seeds are we sowing?

What small seeds might we plant that can grow beyond what we first envisioned?

Are we able to live into mystery and let the seed grow as it will?

This is certainly not an exhaustive list, but you get the idea.

We are all sowers, you and I. We all have the ability to plant a ministry seed and work to help make it grow. We all plant seeds of faith in various places and we hope they grow.

While I was at Clergy Retreat in Lander a couple of weeks ago, we received a packet of stuff from the presenter. One of these things was a seven-page handout of various prayers, meditations, quotes, and resources. That packet included a poetic prayer of sowing from the Iona Community, which I thought was particularly appropriate on this Sunday when we hear Jesus tell a couple of sowing parables.

There are copies for you to pick up on the information table in the parish hall after the service if you would like one.

The Prayer of the Sowers, from the Iona Community (slightly adapted by Fr. Todd Young)

A sower went out to sow, and on some ground he sowed the seed of *WELCOMING*.

The seed grew and strangers lost their strangeness,  
And foreigners found a friend, And closed doors became open,  
And hospitality overtook suspicion, And Jesus was embraced incognito.

A sower went out to sow, and on some ground she sowed the seed of *LISTENING*.  
And the seed grew,

And hard problems began to be solved, because there was time to unravel them,  
And fears were released, because the fearful one was not judged,  
And forgotten people were heard, because someone paid attention,  
And the truth was separated from gossip, because there was time.

A sower went out to sow, and on some ground he sowed the seed of *CARING*.

And the seed grew, so that hungry people were fed with more than food,  
And ignored people were attended to, And guilty people were forgiven,  
And those who seemed untouchable found themselves embraced,  
And the compassion of Christ was known again on earth.

A sower went out to sow, and on some ground she sowed the seed of  
*ENCOURAGEMENT.*

And the seed grew, and shy people lost their reticence, And quiet people found their  
voice,  
And those who thought they were worthless discovered their value,  
And hidden talent was revealed.

A sower went out to sow, and on some ground he sowed the seed of *TELLING.*  
And the seed grew, and stories were told to children, and history was told to the  
young,  
And jokes were told in cheerless places,  
And the good news was told to those who were despondent,  
And the Gospel of the Lord of Life was told through the lives of God's people.

A sower went out to sow, and on some ground she sowed the seed of  
*IMAGINATION.*  
And the seed grew, and young people saw visions, and old people dreamed dreams,  
And some drew or wrote or danced or sang, who never thought they had it in them,  
And some stopped revisiting their past in order to visualize God's future.

A sower went out to sow, and on some ground they sowed the seed of *CHANGE.*  
And the seed grew, and people moved from prejudice to truth, and from despair to  
hope,  
And from apathy to faith, and old churches became radical communities,  
And old people became the midwives of God's coming kingdom.

We are all sowers, you and I. What seeds will you sow during this time of growth?