

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
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### Mustard Seed Sermon

This sermon was preached from notes, not a manuscript. So here are the highlights?

- ❖ We can look at our scriptures as one long narrative, revealed in bits and pieces, of God's action and humankind's response, in bringing the world back in reconciliation, between humans and between the divine and humanity.
- ❖ Likewise with parables, each one offers a piece of the bigger trust. At times we may find them confusing, often challenging, often comforting, and often produce "aha moments"
- ❖ Sometimes it's helpful to look at the obvious messages and get that out of the way, and then to listen for the invitation to go into a deeper place of challenge.
- ❖ Let's start with some of the obvious points:
  - When something is very small, it can be easily overlooked or dismissed at first; but that's a mistake, for there is often great power hidden within
    - Who would have thought a crucified son of a carpenter, or the small ragged group of Jesus followers, would create a following that would cover the earth?
  - Key here: when God is in the mix. When something very small is given over to the power of God, the result is way out of proportion; something very tiny produces something very large.

- We used this parable as our theme for our Vestry retreat this year, I invite you to notice the images as you come forward to receive communion.
- One person's interpretation of this parable is exact this: an idea, however small it seems to us, can make a world of difference.
  - It could be an entry on our website: a photo, a message, and invitation what could bring someone to this church and make a radical difference in their life.
    - One person began attending here because she saw we offered meditation at a church.
  - Our seemingly small idea of offering only one service here in July and August to bring both congregations together, we have no idea what God will do with the connections made
- We never know how one small act of kindness will change someone's life.
- Our job is to scatter seeds, not produce the growth – that's God's job.
  - Our act of scattering then turning it over to God to grow can inform our prayer life; we can become practiced in handing over the smallest of our ideas to God and watching for the growth; but know that it's not us who is making the seeds grow.
  - From 1<sup>st</sup> parable of sower sleeping at night – we can rest into the knowledge that we don't have to do it all ourselves; we are in partnership – and if there's one solid theological framework to the larger narrative

of the scripture, it is to me that we have been invited into a partnership with God, and through that we are healed, we are saved, when we can hand things over and let God do God's work.

- Bit of a challenge, because it means we don't have control over the outcome, but often it's better than we can imagine, don't you think?
- Obvious – We have a part in bringing about the KOG (Kingdom of God); we don't have to do it all; we do it with God; the outcome is often greater than we could ask or imagine; Good reminders, but probably things we already know and live into.
- ❖ One not so obvious thing about this parable relates to the mustard plant
  - I knew invasive plant, once it took root, hard to tear out and it would spread itself everywhere.
  - What I didn't know: mustard seed was a medicinal plant.
  - Hearers of this parable would have known immediately that if the KOG was like a mustard plant, it meant the purpose of the KOG was to heal. We would know when the KOG had come near when healing happened.
    - This image of the KOG being about healing is reinforced by the fact that Jesus came to heal. Half of the gospel stories are about Jesus healing others. Jesus didn't speak so much spoken about sin, doctrine, or family values. Jesus talks a lot about money. And Jesus finds pain, touches it, and heals it.
      - I hadn't known the healing implications of this parable. Perhaps you did?

- Vestry retreat
  - In other art responses to the mustard seed parable, when some spoke about the fruit of the plant, of what we may, as a parish want to offer others, you can hear an image of healing and wholeness:
    - Nourishment
    - Blooming
    - Shelter
    - Rooted in God's love
    - Bending with the wind
    - A place to call home
  - I think your vestry members understand that the KOG we want to allow to be formed here is all about healing and wholeness.
    - One person mentioned to me just last week, when she reflected on what is different about this church than any other, she said, she felt redeemed just by showing up.
- ❖ So, we know from this parable; even our small ideas, given to God, can produce more than we can ask or imagine; We are the scatterers of the seed, God is the grower, and the fruit the kingdom bears is healing. This is all pretty comforting, all we need to do is have an idea, give it to God, and watch it grow and God will do marvelous things with it.
- ❖ So where's our challenge? (all parables, if examined closely enough, challenge us).
- ❖ When I began to reflect upon discerning the challenge, the phrase "In God's time" kept surfacing.

- Brought to mind of how we are to interact with, watch and wait for God to do God's part of enabling the growth.
- Begs the question, how are we to live faithfully when we see but a glimpse of something emerging, or worse yet, see nothing apparent on the horizon of God bringing to fruition our idea?
- ❖ So let's explore this phrase, "In God's time".
  - My experience was that there was a time when I was beginning to explore a call to ordained ministry that I was focused on my chronological time (age 40) but my spiritual direction corrected me and said you're talking about YOUR time, what about God's time in your life? His comments made me think in terms of my spiritual time line. When examined it was clear I was just growing out of infancy, perhaps toddlerhood – taking a few independent steps, but still unsure what the world would be like beyond my next step; spiritual not chronological time line
  - I often hear other people say, "Not my time but God's time".
    - Not always, but this is often said with a sense of resignation
    - Often said when things aren't working out as planned, and it's the only consolation we can reach for. When we are looking for:
      - Peace or renewal in your marriage
      - Children to be in a settled, whole, adult place and it seems like it's taking forever
      - Solution to your financial situation
      - Waiting for the abuse to stop
      - Waiting for it to truly be the last time when you say, and this is my last drink, I'm going to be sober from now on.

- Or a miracle to save someone we love.
- As I thought about the often-time use of this phrase, I thought of the invitation held within it, to not say it from a place of apathy or disappointment, but from a place of watchful engagement and expectancy.
  - What I found difficult about the common use of the phrase “In God’s time”, is that it projects an image of God as a person willy-nilly doling out what we want; that God is either too busy for our request; or chooses not to go along with what we want; or God wants to show us who is in control and deliberately doesn’t give us what we long for, even if it is the healing presence of the KOG, because that’s what will teach you humility.
  - That’s not the God I believe in. I believe in the God, which Marcus Borg describes as “the one we live and move and have our being”. Not a distant person in the sky but rather something, some force of love, which is within us, that is working with us, which is connecting our goodness with the goodness of God, of the universe, and creating things beyond our imagination.
  - So here’s what I think the invitation to us is – (partly out of my own experience)
  - Invitation is to change our hearts so we can actually see what God is doing in our lives to bring about the KOG.
    - Not what is happening TO us by God; but what is happening OF us, WITH us, FOR us, for the kingdom.

- Often it means change within us; not within other people; or within situations. But it's an invitation to look within us.
  - When we look at situations we think should be resolved by God – we need to look at ourselves first
  - What if we imagine this “in God’s time “as advent time – as watchful time, expectant time; not dead time when God isn’t doing anything, but a time when we need to open our eyes to see more clearly that marvelous thing that is happening within us, when we can let go.
- Often when I would be inside and look at at the woods, I wouldn’t see any birds flying around. But if I went outside, stilled myself, cleared my mind of everything I was carrying on my “to do” list, opened myself to feel the breeze, listen for the sounds, then I would become aware of the numerous birds in the woods. They were there the whole time. I just couldn’t see them. So it often is with the presence of God.
- Advent time reminds us of course of Christmas and of incarnation; and incarnation is not limited to God showing up in human form, but because of that, the incarnation is within us and our lives need to be oriented to find the God who is being revealed deep within; the God who calls us to see the growth, not outside of

us, but within us and most important, then turn toward it.

- This is the kicker – this is the hard work -- In order to turn toward it, we must lose ourselves.

❖ Paul --

- Much of what the apostle Paul is talking about in the portion of the letter to the Corinthians we read this morning is about losing ourselves and finding ourselves in Christ.
  - Chardin- theologian who stated we as humans are spiritual beings within a human body – not human body within a spirituality.
- We must lose ourselves to find our selves, our true selves in Christ.
- We must let go of those things, which we attach ourselves to, too tightly (cello sermon)
- We must free ourselves from our small selves.
- As Richard Rohr – daily meditations this week: We have to let go of the part of us that is about “What do I want” What do I prefer or What pleases me?
- We just simply have to let it go.
- In the big scheme, what we want doesn’t really matter.
- We are free when we are free from ourselves.
- And when we are free from ourselves, we are free to see God marvelously at work within us and our lives.

❖ So here’s the interesting part

- The religious word for letting go is forgiveness.
  - What do you think about that?
- So when we need to let go, so we can see God marvelously at work in our lives this moment; (not future point)
- when we understand God’s time to be active alive time, it means we need to forgive:



- Ourselves
  - Others
  - Our responses to others who have hurt us
  - God (sometimes)
  - Whatever it is that we have invested in and identified with that is a part of our own painful story.
- As R. Rohr says, it's that simple and that hard.
- ❖ One challenge in this parable is the invitation to let go; to free ourselves from whatever is holding us back from seeing with the eyes of our hearts the seeds which we need scatter, the movement toward healing are heart is called toward, and the KOG which is near
- ❖ I'd like to give you a clear example of how to scatter seeds and then watch for God's sprouting and growth of the seeds.
  - Many of you know we have an adorable member who is about 4 years old and who is autistic.
  - Now my vision of the harvest will be a time when our church will support this family and others in our neighborhoods; when teachers will be formed to offer Godly Play or a new curriculum by our bishop-elect (Rhythms of Grace); and our members can be given concrete ways to assist the family in getting to church; and offering the freedom to let the children engage in what ways will work for them.
  - In the meantime – I go and scatter the seeds
    - I visit Bella each week
    - I take a Godly Play story out; often same one – she can learn the rhythm; story line – tell the story to her daddy at night
    - I took this parable of the Mustard seed out recently

- We always begin the parable stories in the same way, never identifying Jesus, but speaking about an amazing man who did wondrous things and people following him around. He was always talking about a kingdom. They knew it wasn't an actual place and everyone had lots of questions to ask about it, so this person often began his stories with, "The kingdom of God is like ...". We let the children figure out this man was Jesus.
- Bella was very focused on the nests, how to line them up on the branches, how to put the little birds in the nest; how many would fit in the nests;
- And then I saw how seeds I planted previous weeks sprouted before my eyes. Suddenly Bellas was starting to pray for the little birds in the nests, for we always create prayer circles and put names within them and pray for them. Seeing the familiar shape and birds, representing the people in her family or her friends) she instinctively began to pray for them.
  - Seeds offered before – prayers for others – had taken root
- It was beautiful. I didn't know what God would do with our nests with little birds in it which we prayed for, but I had a sense some divine energy percolating.
- So we went onto other activities: coloring; building blocks; sitting on the floor;
- Then Bella brought blankets and began making a nest in my lap.

- Curled up inside this nest and allowed me to cradle her tenderly
  - Without words, knew she felt safe;
  - KOG had come near – think she need God would always protect her.
  - She asked me to pray and I told her that I prayed she would always know the church would protect her.
    - The seeds kept sprouting and her relationship with God and the church kept growing.
  - My job was not to imagine the growth in any particular way or outcome; not to control it or force it to happen. Not to draw the lines for her.
    - I had had no idea we would revisit the nest and the birds again
  - But my job was to watch expectantly for the glimpse of this sense of God growing in her;
  - Then to celebrate it, name it, and watch for marvelous things.
- ❖ My challenge – That’s my story of scattering seeds and watching God grow them, but what’s your story?
  - ❖ When have you planted seeds and expected God to grow them? What did that process look like?
  - ❖ When did you look within yourself; when did you let go of, when did you forgive, when did you get your stuff out of the way, so you could see God more clearly; look at others through God’s eyes of compassion and healing? And then watch the growth happen into something amazing and out of proportion?
  - ❖ When did you bring about the KOG here and now?
- Amen.