

Sermon – “Faith in a Seed”

Sunday, June 14, 2015

Scripture Readings – 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, Mark 4:26-34

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Our first scripture reading, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, opens with a word of confident reassurance by the Apostle Paul to the believers in Corinth. “So we are always confident!” Paul writes. What makes it possible to remain confident in spite of the day to day challenges is living by faith, *for we walk by faith, not by sight*. According to Hebrews, *Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*. Faith provides a new perspective; the ability to look beyond immediate circumstances, that which is temporary and visible, and see with the eyes of God what is invisible: the mystery, the wonder and the growth that are possible in God’s kingdom. This is the word of God.

6 So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please God. 10 For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil. Amen.

Our gospel reading, Mark 4:26-34 continues the teaching of Christ on the kingdom of God. Using parables, Christ reveals the mystery of God’s presence in our midst, the small beginnings and hidden ways of God’s kingdom transforming people’s lives and communities of faith. Listen for the word of God.

26 Jesus also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27 and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28 The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come." 30 Jesus also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 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." 33 With many such parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34 Jesus did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

The title of the sermon – “Faith in a Seed”

The text: “With what can we compare the kingdom of God...It is like a mustard seed...” Mark 4:30-31a

Let us pray: Holy and Loving God, we thank you for the mystery of your kingdom in our midst and for the seeds that make your kingdom possible. May the words of my mouth and the meditations and thoughts of each of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

Though I do not believe a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders. ~

So writes Henry David Thoreau in 1860. Born in Concord, Massachusetts, Thoreau is best known for his book *Walden*, a reflection upon simple living in natural surroundings, and his essay entitled *Civil Disobedience*, which planted seeds of social justice that germinated in the lives of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Thoreau was part of the Transcendentalism movement that developed in the 1830s and 1840s in the New England region of the United States as a protest to the general state of culture and society. Among the transcendentalists' core beliefs was the inherent goodness of both man and nature. Transcendentalists believed that society and its institutions - particularly organized religion and political parties - ultimately corrupted the purity of the individual. They believed that man is at his best when truly "self-reliant" and independent. So shall we come to look at the world with new eyes.... transcending the society in which we live.

My husband Peter received a copy of *Walden* from his father on the occasion of his confirmation in the eighth grade; a father/son tradition we continued when Paul was confirmed. Thoreau's writings are deeply imbedded in Peter Kieffer, especially in the way he sees the environment and in the belief that man is at his best when living simply and with independence. The yearbook quote Peter chose upon his graduation from college was from Thoreau: *The swiftest traveler is he that goes afoot*. Thirty years later, rather than traveling afoot, Peter's self-reliance is evident in the eight mile bicycle commute he takes from our home on Lake Springfield to St. John's Emergency Room or Westminster...some of you have seen him arrive on a Sunday morning as he peddles up in his bright orange vest.

Thoreau's literary style interweaves close natural observation, personal experience, and pointed rhetoric. His observations of seeds and forest growth enrich the biblical metaphor of seed in understanding the mystery and growth within the kingdom of God. It is often the *least among us* who are the seed bearers, whether the squirrels and insects planting the forests and the fields or the teachers, role models, fathers and mothers, nurturing growth within the individual and community. All of our beginnings are humble, whether we are an oak tree or a child of God and we are who we are today because of the seed bearers in our lives. *Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.*

A reflection on the seed bearers is timely for our congregation as we begin Vacation Bible School this week. Remember the children who will participate in your prayers and pray that the seeds planted within their hearts take root as they journey with Jesus. Westminster is also beginning a new endeavor in the literal planting of seeds. In May, the Session voted to explore becoming an Earth Care Congregation within our denomination. This is a way for us to become more accountable in the practice of environmental stewardship and to nurture the gift of the land and the seeds planted by previous generations. *Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.*

Without the seed, there is no growth...no rising of the sprout into the branch that eventually becomes the tree. How the seed becomes the tree is one of the mysteries of God's creation. For Jesus—this ordinary, everyday event of planting seeds sheds light on the beauty of God working in our lives. The kingdom of God grows mysteriously and independently to build character, fortitude and perspective within us. By the grace of God, we are able to live lives that are loving and kind, tall and resilient, with roots that extend deep within the earth,

grounding and nourishing us...the deeper our roots, the taller our reach. *Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.*

George Conway talks about the seeds that make this growth possible in his book on parenting called *Giving Good Gifts*. He talks about the way our children view the world and the values that shape their lives...the seeds we plant that germinate within their hearts. Conway talks about the importance of a *transcendent perspective*, which literally means to be able to look beyond what is in front of us. It allows us to put our present circumstances into the proper perspective... to see things not only from our point of view, but from other's point of view and most importantly from God's perspective! Planting this seed in our children's lives doesn't mean we have all the answers, rather it means we walk with them on their journey of discovering faith in God.

And when these journeys present unexpected change, uninvited detours, complicated circumstances and loss, the seeds that have been planted, even the smallest of all the seeds on earth, sustain us in mysterious and powerful ways.

Joan Chittister reminds us that during times of change and loss: *We learn, just when we think we have nothing, just when it feels that we have not one good thing left in the world, that what we do still have is ourselves. We have, deep down inside us what no one can take away, what can never be lost either to time or to chance: We have the self that brought us to this point—the grit, the hope; the calm; the irrepressible trust in the providence of God despite the turns of fortune—*

Whatever life presents us... whatever path we find ourselves traveling...whatever opportunities we have to plant a seed, even the smallest of seeds, may we walk with courage, plant with conviction and see beyond our immediate circumstances with confidence in the mystery of God's presence in our midst and in the small beginnings and hidden ways of God's kingdom transforming people's lives and communities of faith.

With what can we compare the kingdom of God...it is like a mustard seed..

I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders. Amen.