



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Seeds *The Third Sunday After Pentecost 6132021*

In the name of the loving, liberating, and life-giving God. Amen.

Before we dive into these two parables this morning, it might be worthwhile to remind ourselves that when Jesus talks about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Heaven, or the reign of God or the reign of Heaven, He's not talking about the place we go when we die. He's talking about the world we are called to build right here, right now. Think back to the Lord's Prayer for a moment. That's the prayer that Jesus taught the disciples when they asked how they should pray. And he says, "Pray to God that 'Your kingdom come, that Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'"

The kingdom of God breaks in in those moments of life, fleeting as they might be when that prayer comes true and God's will becomes ours. Moments such as when we stop holding onto old resentments and let forgiveness take root. When we stop looking for payback for a wrong that was done to us, and instead, turn the other cheek or offer them our other coat because now we see that they are in need of it more than me. He's talking about those moments when we have the courage to reach out to a stranger in need, because it's overtaken our fear of being made uncomfortable or experiencing their vulnerability - when our anger at our enemies gives way to empathy and a sincere desire to understand.

He's talking about those moments where we let love disrupt our lives and take us places we never thought we'd go. And along the way, destroy the divisions that separate us. Moments like those are when the kingdom of God breaks in. That's the reign of God spilling out into our world. And so the challenge of Christianity isn't really getting into Heaven. It's about helping bring a little Heaven to Earth. And the good news is, as Jesus tells us in this first parable, it's not on all of us. It's in the nature of the kingdom to break through. It's in the nature of God's love to win out. And it's going to happen when we least expect it. And it's not something we can plan for. It's not something we could ever try to schedule. It is like a seed that once scattered takes root and sprouts on its own.

And we can sleep. We can rise. We can go about our business. We can forget all about it. We can get distracted, like we tend to do. But the reign of God, once that seed has been sown, it's going to sprout and grow on its own. And it's going to happen in God's time, not ours. And so it can't be strategically planned.

It can't be carefully scripted. We don't know how it all works and we don't need to.

Now all of this is not to say we don't have a role. We can help scatter the seeds. We can help prepare the soil. We can water it. We can feed it. We can make our plans because we love to make our plans, don't we? But as any gardener will tell you, no matter what you do, no matter how good you are, we can't control, we can't predict what seeds are going to sprout and when they're going to come take root. In fact, the seeds of God's love can even be scattered with us without us even knowing it, right?

Have you experienced that in your own life? Can you relate to that in any way? I saw it the day that my mom came to church for the very first time. She had come to stay with us for the summer. I had recently left my law practice to go to work for the cathedral as the director of development. And my mom who never took us to church as kids, who didn't have a religious bone in her body, well, you could just see her eyes roll at the idea of me becoming so involved in a church of all places.

And don't get me wrong, she was plenty spiritual, but more like crystals and tarot cards kind of spiritual, astrology kind of stuff. So this idea of me, not only going to church, but now working for a church, to her, it was, oh, it's just another phase he's going through. It's not going to last. So anyway, I'm going about my business, working at the cathedral and I was doing a lot of events in those days, putting on fundraisers and stewardship, receptions and conferences, that sort of thing. And one day I was shorthanded. So I asked my mom, she had some time on her hands. "Would you mind coming and help put together some appetizers?" She's a great cook. She loves to entertain. She said, "Sure."

And it couldn't have been more than maybe an hour into that event, I look across the room and there she is having a grand old time chatting people up, having a glass of wine, laughing, carrying on. She enjoyed herself enough that she actually became a kind of permanent volunteer over the summer. She became a kind of informal member of the hospitality and the stewardship team. And then one Sunday, I was up at the altar before the services rehearsing the acolytes. I was a verger back then. And I see in the back of the church, my mom coming down the center aisle, looking for a pew and I rushed down to meet her and I'm like, "Mom, what are you doing here?" And she says, "Hey, this is a public church. I'm allowed to come. Aren't I? I have friends here now. I know people." I said, "Sure, no problem. Welcome."

So the next thing you know, my mom is coming to church every week and she even then signs up for one of my bible classes I'm taking. And again, I just assume that she's just being supportive of her son and his new job. And then one night though, at home, I see on her bed, on her nightstand by her bed, one

of the Bible passages that I had passed out a couple of weeks before. It was that passage from Matthew, where Jesus says, do not worry. Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, what you will wear, what you will drink. Don't worry about your body or what you will wear. Look at the birds of the sky, don't I take care of them? And don't you know, I love you even more and I'm going to take care of you all the more?

And I asked her about it. And she said that she had been reading that passage each night before she went to bed because it brought her such peace. From the tiniest of seeds, chopping vegetables at a church fundraiser, a seed I had no idea had been planted, and one which I assure you got no watering from me, that seed sprouted and it took root. And now she offers morning prayer every week for folks in her neighborhood. So yeah, we are called to be salt and light in the world. We are called to join in and help scatter and nurture the seeds that are sown, but have no doubt it is not all on us. The reign of God has its own fuel and it can spread like wildfire.

In fact, it can even get out of control, which brings us to the second parable this morning. The one about that cute little mustard seed that you sang about in Sunday school. But at first, let's remind ourselves about parables for a moment. They're not like childhood fables. They don't have a moral at the end of the story for us to remember. They aren't simply metaphors or analogies where we have to sort out who the different players represent. Think of them instead as provocative comparisons.

Eugene Peterson, a priest and prolific Bible scholar, calls them narrative time bombs. They place completely unexpected ideas, even controversial ones side-by-side in order to make points that not only tells us something, but it's designed to provoke a reaction because it subverts our expectations. And that is what Jesus is doing with this one, because comparing the reign of God to a mustard seed, it would have caused His listeners to choke had they been eating when they heard it. They would have fallen out of their chairs laughing had they been sitting.

Instead of comparing the kingdom of God to something high and mighty, the lofty and the noble, as we heard in the earlier reading from Ezekiel, Jesus goes with a mustard seed, the tiniest of seeds, which really doesn't even grow into a tree at all. It's more of a shrub really, but more than that. It's basically a weed. It's invasive. It's disruptive. Farmers hate it because it gets into their crops. Ranchers hate it because it irritates the eyes of their livestock. And once it takes hold, it spreads everywhere.

Any Southerners at home or in the room? Think kudzu, right? That ivy that covers everything. For you lawn owners out there, think dandy lions, crab grass. So Jesus is telling us not only is the reign of God able to take root and grow in

places we didn't expect. We might even experience it as a nuisance because it's going to get into things we don't want it to get into. It's going to show up in places we'd prefer it not to be. It's going to find its way into our finely ordered crops and our well-manicured lives and it's going to make a beautiful and holy mess of things.

In fact, we might not even recognize it because it's not going to conform to our notions and expectations of grandeur and greatness. It's not going to be domesticated into a children's story. It's not going to be contained in our lofty cathedrals. Like a weed, it's going to spread, it's scrappy, it's resilient. And if we try to mow it down, it's coming back. If we try to spray it with Roundup, it will return. And when we try to pull it out by the roots, those seeds will only spread further.

So let me end with a couple more provocative comparisons. The kingdom of God is like a bus driver who tried to uproot a woman from her seat only to give birth to a national movement that changed the lives of millions. The kingdom of God is like an assassin who tried to silence a prophet only to create a chorus that continues to sing to this day. The kingdom of God, it's like a parade of drag queens and go-go dancers, Dykes on bikes and straight allies with feather boas who make shade for God's love in all its varieties wherever they go. The kingdom of God is like a church that got into hot water because it risked all to welcome all, to affirm all, to bless all, to ordain all and in time to marry all. The kingdom of God is like an empire who tried to stop a movement before it got started, who crucified its founder, and when that failed, tried to bury His followers. They didn't know we were seeds.

Amen.