

We are Church **TOGETHER**

2015 Assembly Sermon - +Bishop Jon V. Anderson

Proper 6B – Pentecost 3

Gospel- Mark 4:26-34

26 He 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 He 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 he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34 he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Second Reading - 2 Corinthians 5:6-10 [11-13] 14-17

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 him. 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. 11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. 12 We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. 15 And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. 16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible

Thesis: God's hidden, mysterious work in the world and in us will be fruitful.
+Bishop Jon V. Anderson

Grace to you and peace sisters and brothers in Christ and in God's hidden, mysterious work. Grace to you and peace on this day when we remember and celebrate God's hidden and mysterious work in your life, in our Church and God's world. Amen.

I love to garden.

Gardening makes me wonder how God has been sowing seeds in my life and in your life lately. Think about it for a second. How has God been growing fruit in you as a part of God's great mission for the world? Maybe it was something you read, watched or experienced that touched you deeply and made you aware of God's presence and work? Maybe it was something that you could feel coming for a while. Or maybe the breaking open of something new in your soul came as a sudden surprise.

Today's Gospel continues a chain of parables about sowers and seeds. We sometimes want to think we are the sowers and focus on the choices we make as Christians. They do matter, but the text is talking more about God's work in our life and in our world. Like the parable of the sower and the seed, the great news is that God loves to generously and abundantly, seed our lives and world with God's grace whether we notice or not...whether we are ready or not. Today's lessons continue to remind us of God's gracious and mysterious work. Let's focus on our God who loves to plant seeds...God's hidden, mysterious work in the world and in each of you.

God is not done with you, your congregation, your synod, your Church body and God's world. The parable of the mustard seed was comforting for the early Christians who did not know if their efforts would make a difference. It gave them hope. It must have been daunting to think about sharing the Good News of Jesus in a world full of many religions, great conflict, many cultures and so much uncertainty. In a similar way the parable of the mustard seed comforts us today as the Church loses status in society and priority in people's lives. It comforts us as we journey through our spiritual lives, especially seasons of fall and winter, when our doubts and spiritual struggles multiply. When our lives seem as barren as the fields in early spring, it is comforting to know God is sowing seeds even when we may not notice or when we are unsure of what kind of soil we are. Out of the winter of the cross, God brought forth the springtime of the resurrection and the summer of Pentecost. There is hope.

I love that in this lesson the image for the Kingdom of God is not some grand tree like a cedar tree or the oaks that we hear about in other lessons. Instead the kingdom, the rule, the reign of God, begins like the smallest of seeds, the mustard seed and grows into a shrub large enough for birds to build their nests. God is at work planting seeds of hope, of love, of justice, of forgiveness and faith in each of us. God is at work in our families tilling the soil disturbing normal, planting seeds of God's new creation. God is at work in our congregations, synods, church body and the Church in all its forms. The ways God works to change our lives, our congregations and our world may seem to start small. Yet, like the mustard seed God brings significant change and transformation from the smallest of beginnings. God's Holy Spirit is at work. God breaks our lives open like seeds and grows new life in the light of the Son, Jesus our Lord. God's Spirit blows in our midst spreading the pollen of God's grace that sets off the amazing mystery of faith, hope and love. It may start small, but look out when God gets going.

God's works in many different ways to plant God's future in God's world and in our lives. God is busy working in the whole world whether we can see it or not. God's work in the world includes God's great

Church which serves God's mission in the world. Like the soils can hinder the growth of the seed, so also our life and our life together can make it harder for God's kingdom, God's rule, to unfold in completeness. But the sower, the farmer, the planter of mustard seeds will not be stopped from planting God's longing for God's world and God's church and our lives inside of us all. The pollen of God's mercy and love brings forth new life in all kinds of ways.

God's Church is one place and way God plants seeds in this world. As God calls, gathers, brings light and makes us holy at the font or around the table we give thanks. In worship God is busy planting seeds in proclamation of Word, in prayers public and private, in songs and hymns traditional or new. God plants seeds through the witness of people inside our community of faith. God also plants seeds in God's world as people live out their many callings in everyday life as neighbors in a great hymn of praise to God. God is wily and tricky using seeds that start out so small they don't seem like a threat that then mysteriously make such an impact in our lives. "We are Church Together" receiving the wonder and gifts of God's grace.

God plants seeds through congregations like yours that are placed in a local mission field to proclaim the Good News and nurture faithful, fruitful Christ followers. We give thanks for the witness of each of our congregations, trusting God continues to plant new seeds in them and through them in the lives of people all around. You are church together. God's graciously proclaims the Good News and sends people out who don't they are not that important, but God uses their lives to change the world.

God plants seeds through your Churchwide expression of Church, and through other denominations. "We are Church together." We give thanks that we are Church together with people in Southern Africa and Virginia. These partners remind us that God is up to something planting the seeds of God's kingdom there, too. Your mission support that your congregation shares, little packets of financial love, make seed planting possible. God plants seeds that grow in our local context. We are thankful God has called us to be a great Church which plants the Good News in Christ's name around the world.

"We are Church together" as God plants seeds throughout this Synod our regional mission field. Synods focus on growing leaders, congregations and extending mission. We convene people to share insights as they engage in mission development or redevelopment. We provide first aid and caregiving when people or congregations are damaged by life or through conflict – trying to help people engage in constructive instead of destructive wrestling with their concerns. We listen to what our planting God is doing and share it with other leaders and congregations as connectors. We believe we are called to equip God's people to embrace God's great mission for this whole world.

God works in places you would not expect like a cradle, a cross and you and me. God works through people who get it wrong, like the confused disciples back in time and all too human disciples here and now. God's planting often begins small, in quiet and in hidden ways. It is always a mystery how God sows new dreams and sustains God's dreams already producing fruit and faith.

The Kingdom of God – is like a mustard seed....a mustard bush. If we were not used to this language we would see how jarring that image is. It does not fit in many ways. Yet this disturbing image is perfect because it points out how different God's reign and work is. Jesus wants us to know God's deepest dream for your life and mine looks different than all the empires of this world. God's mysterious work in the world and in us will be fruitful even though we can hardly see it at the beginning. The love of Christ keeps urging us on like the sun and rain keep growing the plants in our gardens bringing forth beauty and fruit. For in Christ all things are made new. "