



## Sermon for the 3rd Sunday after Pentecost, June 2021

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Glenda Empsall

[1 Samuel 15:34-16:13, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10,\[11-13\],14-17, Mark 4:26-34](#)

May the Word of God be in our imagination, in our hearing and in our understanding. May the power of the Holy Spirit be in our lives and give us the courage to become creative and compelling witnesses to the Good News. May the unconditional love of Jesus be in our hearts, so that all we do benefits this congregation, this community, this country and the world, all to your glory, heavenly Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Backstory for today's Old Testament Lesson:

The people turned away from God and demanded a human king. The prophet Samuel warned them what would happen if they abandoned the rule of God, but the people were insistent. In the end, even God, in a moment of apparent frustration as real as human parents experience with wayward children, told Samuel to anoint Saul king over Israel and let them suffer the consequences of their choices.

The bible says that Saul was a head taller than anyone else in Israel and he was a fierce warrior/leader. The book of Samuel tells how Saul and his armies fought and prevailed against Israel's enemies on every side: Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, the kings of Zobah and the Amalekites. Saul chased the Philistines back to their own land to fight another day. "All the days of Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines, and whenever Saul saw a mighty or brave man, he took him into his service." just as Samuel had warned.

John Dalberg-Acton was an English Catholic historian, politician, and writer, best known for a remark he made in an 1887 letter to Anglican Bishop, Mandell Creighton, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely..." This was certainly true of many kings of Israel, even the greatest king, David, who Samuel anointed to rule after Saul. God looks on the heart rather than on physical features. Apparently hearts can change. Stay tuned.

Perspective is everything! Paul admonished the church in Corinth, "...regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ as human. If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away. Everything has become new!"

Let us look with fresh eyes at this gospel story. Jesus was teaching and preaching, surrounded by a huge crowd of followers – artisans, service people; maybe some shepherds and farmers. His disciples were there, too – fishermen. Don't forget the Scribes and the Pharisees who were there to cast dispersions, hoping to trip Jesus up.

The stories Jesus told the crowds are called "parables" a word that comes from the Greek words, para – as in parallel (side by side) and bala (to cast or to throw). A parable compares two images and invites us to think about what happens in the story and what happens in our own lives. A parable challenges us to see more to the story than we might have imagined; to look for "aha" moments.

The mustard plant is a drought-hardy evergreen shrub [Salvadora Persica] that grows in Africa, India and the Middle East. The seeds are about the size of the head of a quilter's pin, smaller than a BB. The tree grows 20 to 23 feet tall and is just as wide, with low branches, convenient for livestock to munch. Perhaps there were mustard trees growing near where Jesus was speaking and that is why he used it as an image for this parable.

The kingdom of God is like this, Jesus said. Someone scatters seed on the ground, planting all day to the best of their abilities. Then they go to sleep leaving their work in the care of the Creator who has given power to the seed. The seed dies in the ground and the plant that grows looks nothing like the seed.

The seed in the ground, with a little moisture and warm sunshine, will grow no matter what you do, maybe in spite of what you do. You don't have to understand the how or why of it. It is a mystery. It is natural for seeds to grow and to produce. In this parable Jesus emphasized that the size of the seed has nothing to do with size of the plant that sprouts from it.

Jesus was preparing his disciples to go out into the world to spread good news to the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. On this mission, he knew they would face many difficulties. He knew he would not be with them. This was Jesus' encouragement to the disciples. They must trust in the power of the words they would speak. The self-contained power of the word never fails. Plant the seed. Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God and we are learning about the Kin-dom, the family of God. My "aha " moment was when I began to write kin-dom and saw kind-om.

These are the powerful seeds I choose to plant: seeds of kindness and seeds of inner peace, seeds of love, seeds of hope, seeds of trust, seeds of service, seeds of change, seeds of resilience. Let us nourish those seeds. Let us protect those seeds. And, when the time is ripe, let us reap the rewards of our labor – beloved community.

You who are enlightened about what the kingdom of God is like are being sent out to use your energy to advance God's kingdom in the world. No matter how small or insignificant you might think it is, there is no resource: no skill, no idea, no talent, no treasure that you have, that God cannot use! Amen.