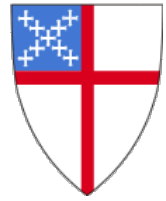




Sermon for the 4th Sunday after Pentecost (June 16)

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St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene, ID



1 Samuel 15:34-16:13

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

Mark 4:26-34

*Lord Jesus, in you we are new creations –
the old has passed away and everything has become new.
So, while some put their trust in chariots and horses,
we put our trust in you and call upon your name, Oh Christ. Amen.*

Good morning, and blessings to you all on this Father's Day!

This is a day of celebration, of remembrance, and for some a day of sadness as we remember our own fathers and those who have been fathers to us, and as some of us are celebrated, remembered, and noted with sadness as fathers. Fathers, like mothers, are not perfect. We pray that we have been good enough to let the ground be fertile for growth.

In our house, gifts for special days tend to drift in, before and after the day. Father's Day is like that. So, some weeks ago I got a book from my family, *The Vegetable Garden Problem Solver Handbook* – "Identify and manage diseases and other common problems on edible plants." Hmm. On one hand, I was grateful. On another hand, I thought, "Are my family members saying something about my gardening skill?" But, on a third hand, I know that there is a lot I do not know. Plants will be plants, bugs will be bugs, soil will be soil, and infections and problems can just spread. I'm glad for the help!

Today, we heard parables by Jesus about seeds and plants. They come at the end of this chapter in Mark, where at the beginning is the more common parable most of us know about the sower of seeds. You know, a farmer goes out to sow seeds, and spreads it around everywhere – some on hard packed soil that was like pavement, some on thorny soil, some on rocky gravelly soil, and some on good rich soil. This is a parable of a willy-nilly sower, a wasteful sower. What farmer spreads seeds everywhere like that?

And now, at the end of that chapter, Jesus offers the two parables we heard today: one about seeds that are planted into the soil and grow, the farmer has no idea how, and the farmer is not active in the field again until harvest time; and one about mustard seeds that Jesus says are the smallest seeds and grow into the biggest bushes.

These are not guidelines for best farming practice or wise insights about seeds. Let's just remember that Jesus is not a farmer. Jesus is a carpenter, and a teacher, and a healer. But, if we want to be literalist about his parables, we will be frustrated. His stories from the garden and farm are just a bit off.

And actually, my friends, that is part of the point of these parables. The kingdom of God is, well, something like what you've seen before, but also very different and stretching beyond what you have seen and known and learned to expect in life.

How many of you have found fatherhood, or motherhood, like that? Very different and beyond what you have seen and known? From the moment a child begins to form, onward through the first breaths and first bites of

food and first steps, on through life, we see these seeds grow and spread roots and branches, and we do not know how it is all happening. We may be filled with wonder, and awe, and alarm, and puzzlement, and joy, at all that is happening. We may be trying to follow the best practices we can learn and put into motion with our children and families, but how these seeds grow is a holy mystery beyond our knowing.

What Jesus says in this first parable we hear today is like what he said to Nicodemus in John's gospel, which we heard a few weeks ago. Today we hear that the seed sprouts and grows, and the planter doesn't know how. It's like what Jesus says to Nicodemus about the wind – the wind blows and you feel it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with the Spirit.

So it is with the Spirit. So it is with God's kingdom. So it is with the movement of God in our lives.

We don't know how. We don't know how it starts and unfolds. We don't know where it is going. That is true in our own lives. And that is true in every life.

Life in God is not something we can pin down.

God is God. And God will choose to act, not according to our wisdom or the way we see things.

God chooses and calls for the anointing of a boy – none of his tougher and manlier older brothers, but a boy who is red-cheeked and has pretty eyes and is handsome – a boy maybe a bit like young Joseph who jealous brothers nearly killed and instead sold into slavery, who later saved them all from starvation.

The ancient people of God could not govern themselves. As libertarians, they were failures – or, they were simply all too human – and so they each did according to what was right for them, and thus over time drifted away from God and from God's ways. So God stirred the hearts of people to lead and redirect them, and people came to their senses for a time... and then, the pattern of decline repeated itself.

So, the people grew weary of this pattern over many generations. And they said, "If only we had a king. Someone just needs to take control. We need a king who will guide us." Because they could not hold in their hearts enough of a center for God to guide them.

So, they called their first king. Saul, who stood high above others, who was tall and strong but rather withdrawing from the limelight. Saul, who was a bit of a giant among his own people – and yet, as we will find later, was not ready himself to stand up to Goliath the giant among the Philistines. Saul, who took into his own hands the right to act on God's behalf and to make adjustments to God's expectations and commands. Saul, who was given to intense moodiness. But Saul, who was tall and strong and looked like a tower of strength.

This was not God's vision for God's people. But God conceded and made way for the people's wishes. They had their king, and began down a path that would lead to autocracy under Solomon and a divided kingdom under future kings that, for the most part, were problems under whom there were terrible injustices and abuses of power.

But in this one moment, a pivotal moment, God intervenes and calls on the aged prophet Samuel to anoint a new king. Young David, the shepherding lad, the harp-playing singer, the beautiful one, not yet a warrior. David is anointed, and the Spirit of God rested mightily on him from that moment through the rest of his days. We do not know how. He did not know how. And he mis-stepped in big ways across his days.

The Spirit blows where it will. The seeds are spread where God wills. The seed grows in the earth, as it will. The commonplace seed will shrink to seem like almost nothing but grow into something never expected. With or without our help. We do not know how.

Are we willing to let go of our desire to control, to know, to be certain? Are we willing to give up our yearning to have things unfold in life according to how we see best, and our resentments and suspicions and bitterness when things don't follow our plan for the world – for our communities – for our families – even for our own lives? Are we ready to let the Spirit blow where it will and follow the movement of the Spirit?

So many of us have faced challenges that have taken us far afield from where we thought we were going, and our lives have moved in different paths. So many of us have found opportunities and pathways presenting themselves in our lives – and we don't know where they have come from or where they are going to take us. All along the way, God has been with us. The wind of the Spirit has blown, the seeds of God have been sown and planted, and the ground around and within us has nurtured new life to burst forth from the soil.

These are challenging days in our world. Wars, and famines, and competitions over resources, and rumors of wars and efforts at destruction and reconstruction, and once again the terrors of mass shootings, and ever-spiraling costs, and a world that is truly heating up. Here in our own region, like in other places, people heating up for attack on others, and people seeing the absolute worst in the world around them.

Yet. Yes, yet, the Spirit of God is still moving and will always be moving. Can we open our hearts to sense God's movement? It can be hard to open ourselves and be willing to sense the free flow of God when we have been busy building up walls of resistance to what is going on around us and maybe even inside us. It can feel risky to open ourselves to following the flow of God when we are clinging to patterns and routines that we believe are protecting us.

Are you ready, are you willing, to let the Spirit of God rest mightily on you? No matter what your age, what your past experience, what your choices and regrets, no matter how right you feel or how wronged you feel, no matter what the past has been or the future seems to threaten? Are you ready, are you willing, today, to open yourself to the free flow of the Holy Spirit, the new seeds being spread with care in the soil of your own life?

Even today. And every day. Open your heart, open your windows, open your garden and ground. Let your soul be touched by the wind of the Spirit and the seed of God. Let Christ continue to make all things new within you and pray that God will make all things new in all around you. Christ Jesus says, "Come. Come to my garden. Come, be my garden. Come and see this place, and be part of this place, this my kingdom, where we are wasteful in spreading the seeds of love, where growth happens just because, where things are more than what they seem to be, where the unexpected happens. Come, give yourself to the Spirit and to the soil. Come and be. Come and see. Come and live. Follow me."