

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections based on this week's lectionary readings

June 14, 2015

Proper 6B/Ordinary 11B/Pentecost 3

The readings this week:

- 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13 ◦ Psalm 20
- 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, (11-13), 14-17 ◦ Mark 4:26-34

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

On Volunteer Tomatoes and the Kingdom of God...

This is a great lesson for those of us who are living in farm country at this time of year, for the image Jesus offers now abounds all around us. Now I have to say that I'm not much of a gardener myself, but friends everywhere are putting their energy into the annual task of sowing seeds and planting seedlings and tending to watering and putting up fences trying to keep out various pests on four legs which would rob them of their much anticipated harvest.

Even so, I do know that such efforts require dedication and sometimes just plain hard work. I used to watch my dad get the rototiller out every spring and dig up the huge expanse of garden in our back yard where he would spend time most every summer evening. I also remember it seemed to be a labor of love for him, for he took great pride in the buckets of tomatoes and overgrown zucchini he would give away come August. I remember, too, the delight he took in the 'volunteer tomatoes' which he hadn't planted but which had miraculously found life via seeds inadvertently left behind from the previous fall's harvest. He would laugh, pointing out how they would show up in odd, but expected places, like the compost pile. It was clear that the fruit of those plants was all the more wondrous for his having nothing to do with their being.

We shared together in a 'blessing of summer' last Sunday morning at worship. Various ones among us brought in symbols of summer. We had a pair of sandals and a beach towel. There were a couple of bicycle helmets, some grass clippers, a GPS unit and some sidewalk chalk. One very hopeful fan brought in a Chicago Cubs t-shirt, for whom no amount of blessing is likely to help this season! And one of our farmers brought in three bags of seeds: one of corn, another of beans, and another of wheat. After worship, I bumped into him following our coffee hour. He had all three bags in hand. His eyes were dancing and there was a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth as he said to me, "Now all I have to do is leave these be, right? Since they've been blessed they should just grow all on their own!" We both laughed then for we knew he wasn't serious.

And yet, although that's not quite what our Gospel lesson

would have us do with the 'Kingdom Seeds' Jesus speaks of here, it's pretty close. And I believe this still speaks even though our practice of farming or gardening differs greatly from how it would have been in Jesus' time. For even though unlike in the time of Jesus, today one may spend time and other more sophisticated resources tilling the earth, testing the soil, and guarding against weeds and other pests, there is still mystery in how a seed actually grows. We can control many things. We may be able to enhance a seed's ability to take root and grow. But you and I? No matter how hard we may try, in the end we can't make it happen.

And, in fact, the parable offered this week has the seed being scattered but after that, until the harvest the farmer's effort is negligible. Indeed, the emphasis in Jesus' image today is on what God does when we're not looking; on all that happens for which you and I cannot begin to take credit. To be sure, this parable points to the hope that belongs to us all because of our confidence that God is working even or especially when we're not looking, in ways mysterious and profound.

And so it is I've always taken Jesus' words today as wonderful encouragement to simply do what it is I'm called to do and let the rest go. For there is much I have no control over. And thankfully, there is also a great deal in our experience that tells us that God is working even when we can't yet see it.

And yet, I confess that I am also still learning to trust that this is so. I tend, still, to try to carry far too much responsibility for what is and for what could yet be. I wonder how much more energy I might have to simply do my part if I learned to rely more fully on the hope I've been given...if I learned more surely, along with the farmer in Jesus' parable today, to simply scatter the seed and then truly leave the rest to God?

And I wonder now especially just what this would look like with the children we are called to mentor in faith and in life? I wonder what this looks like in a difficult encounter with a co-worker. I wonder what this would look like in my conversation with a neighbor for whom faith seems to have little value or meaning.

I wonder what it would look like to simply scatter seeds and then trust God with the rest.

Reflecting on the Word



1st Reading: 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13

What did Saul do that would make God disappointed in him as king? What was wrong with that? What does it say about God if God can be disappointed or grieved by a decision? Does it bother you that God could have regrets? How did Samuel choose which son to choose as king? How would you feel if your younger brother was chosen over you? What does it mean to be a man after God's own heart? Do you think it is possible to live like that even though you are not perfect? Do you think your actions really portray what your heart is like? How would you be viewed differently if people could look at your heart rather than your actions? thefaithlab.com

Psalm Reading: Psalm 20

David is facing yet another battle. Have you ever felt like David? Another day brings another battle. Maybe your battle is in your home as you wake up and remember that you alone are responsible for the welfare of your child (ren). Your battle may be the terminal disease or chronic illness that robs you of the simple pleasures. Perhaps your battle is in your mind as you fight the lies that have stolen your self-worth. David demonstrates the most important battle strategy: start with prayer. Picture David praying as he suits up for battle. Do you suit up for the day through prayer? If not, how can you change your habits? If so, did you learn anything from this psalm that might change the way you pray? [Wendy Pope](#)



The Rhythm of Organic Kingdom Growth

Living as I do in the second half of my life, I recognize looking back, that I really didn't make much happen. Somehow my life unfolded. Was it John Lennon who said, "Life is what happens while you are making other plans."? That isn't to say that I haven't been occupied and obsessed with trying to strategize and organize, manipulate and manage the direction and flow of where my life was going. Somehow though, the really good things that have come my way have been more organic and opportunistic than my plans would have plotted. Knowing this makes me really appreciate the teaching of Jesus for this Sunday. The kingdom of God happens. It is organic. Although we can cooperate with the processes of God we should never think we can control them. Thank God. Mystery will always triumph over our manipulation. I love Jesuit Fr. Anthony de Mello's definition of enlightenment. "Enlightenment", he says, "is complete co-operation with the inevitable." That is the Kingdom.

Peter Woods, [The Listening Hermit](#)

3rd Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, (11-13), 14-17

Have you suffered? So did Paul, and Christ for that matter. You are not alone. The words of our Scriptures are not naïve with regards to suffering. So Paul can yearn for the day he is at home with the Lord. What might it mean to walk by faith, or live by faith? What do you think it means to walk by sight? What is the opposite of faith, doubt, fear, despair? What might it mean for you to live your life with a ministry of reconciliation? What might it mean for your church to carry out a ministry of reconciliation in your community? [Gulf Coast Synod, ELCA](#)

4th Reading: Mark 4:26-34

Jesus uses the mystery of seed germination as an illustration in this passage. What hidden natural process most fascinates you? What different aspects of planting do these two parables (verses 1-20, 26-29) emphasize? What do we learn about God's Word from this story? Do you remember a time when God spoke powerfully to you through His Word, to convert or convict or encourage you? How can this parable encourage and direct our evangelism? What happens in Christ's third parable about planting? How does this illustrate the kingdom of God? [Intervarsity Christian Fellowship](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

We feel like mustard seeds, tiny and insignificant. Like unplanted seeds, we forget that it is our calling to be planted in the warmth of God's earth. May the Great Spirit carry our seeds to fertile ground where the roots of our faith may grow deeply and the branches of our love be broad.

[Outside the Box](#), Katherine Hawker