

“Seed” GPPC 6-17-18
Psalm 20, Mark 4:26-34

[Prior to the sermon. To allow time for our graduates to speak, instead of a full-length sermon, I’m just going to preach a five-minute meditation.]

Jesus gives two parables, similes actually, about what the kingdom of God or reign of God is like. He says, “It’s like a farmer scattering seed on the ground. Then he goes, sleeps at night and works in the day. And the seed sprouts and grows; he doesn’t exactly know how. The earth produces of itself. But when the grain is ripe, he goes and harvests it.” The kingdom of God is like that.

But you know if you watch enough TV or read enough news, it’s easy to get discouraged, isn’t it? Human rights violations against desperate children and parents on our southern border. Violence, poverty, hunger. Murderous dictators strutting around the world stage. Name-calling and nastiness instead of vigorous and respectful dialogue about the great issues of the day. And, of course, there are our own sins to contend with. It’s easy to become disheartened.

Jeff Paschal

But Jesus says the kingdom of God, God's coming reign is sneaky. While we rightfully lament that God's kingdom doesn't come faster, it *does* finally come, like that's farmer's harvest, beyond our predicting or controlling. From God there is ultimately an irresistible force of life beyond our comprehension or management. As Jesus says, "The earth produces of itself." The Greek word is *automatos* from which we get the word automatic.

So we don't completely understand and we certainly don't control when the reign of God comes in all its fullness. But the church is not idle or complacent either. Like the farmer, we all have parts to play in the coming kingdom of God--speaking, acting, giving. You graduates have a part in the process. How will you be an instrument of God's love with your life? And how will the rest of us?

Then Jesus also says "The kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed. You sow it on the ground, and it grows up to be the largest shrub, so big that birds make nests in its shade."

Jeff Paschal

The largest shrub? Well, that doesn't sound all that impressive. Lord, how about a majestic and mighty sequoia or at least give us an oak tree? Nope. A big old scraggly shrub.

The image is intentional. Take a look at Guilford Park Presbyterian in a typical week. A few people gathered for worship. We sing some hymns. Say prayers. Read from the Bible. Hear a sermon. Give an offering. Maybe go to a Sunday school class. During the week, women's circles, fellowship groups, committees meet, kids play, mentoring takes place. It's good, but in the grand scheme of things it looks tiny, insignificant.

But again God is sneaky, because this congregation is part of the church universal, the Body of Christ, around the world in every time and place. And that church is always amazing and untidy at the same time. It's a giant shrub, not a redwood. But just as birds build their nests in overgrown bushes, the church is a community of life and nurture for us and for the world we reach out to. How will you graduates find life in your commitment to Christ in the miraculous and messy church? And how will the rest of us?

Jeff Paschal

Finally, Mark says Jesus told these parables for people who were listening and able to hear. But then Jesus did something strange. He explained everything in private to his disciples. Why? Why not just tell everybody? Maybe those who were really trying to follow Jesus received a more thorough explanation and a deeper understanding *because intention makes a difference*. Those who were disciples of Jesus *wanted* to understand more deeply. Those who were followers of Jesus *wanted* to follow even more closely.

I know I'm a resistant, sinful old cuss. So I'm praying for Jesus to make me *want* to understand more deeply and to follow more closely. I'm praying for that. And I pray that for you too. Amen. © Jeff Paschal