

Pentecost 3B. June 17, 2018, Father's Day. Graduation and Teacher recognition. "How does it work?" Dungeness Valley Lutheran Church, Sequim, WA. Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 92; 2 Corinthians 5:6-17; Mark 4:26-34.

26 Jesus also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹But 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? ³¹It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³²yet 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; ³⁴he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

I don't know anything about mustard seeds except that some relatively obscure recipes call for them. And, by the way, they are a lot larger than rhododendron seeds, but Jesus didn't know rhododendrons in the ancient near east. Some of you have listened to my spouse Bob talk about his trips to the far East, seeking special rhody seed. The trips are laborious and long, but the real challenge comes later. The seed is carefully scattered in little plastic tubs on sphagnum moss, covered, put under light on heating pads and WATCHED. Now the gardener "will sleep and rise, night and day" and the seed will sprout, "he does not know how." And on that day, Bob will come up for supper in a much-more-than-jubilant mood, "The *arizelum* has sprouted," he will proclaim. Almost like the NASA engineers, "The eagle has landed" or "we have heard back from Mars." The joy is real!

So I imagine the joy our Lord might feel when children grow up to love God, when fathers and mothers are faithful to their children, when goodness and mercy thrive in public life and when the church flourishes as true Body of Christ.

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In the foreground of our worship today is excitement over Pastor Russ' acceptance of your call. Along with that we are honoring the teachers, graduate, and fathers. It's a time of joy for all of us. It's a time of recognition of jobs well done, work faithfully carried out to the glory of God and the good of our community and families.

But rolling around in the background this morning are other concerns. We wonder about the future of our congregation. Will we have younger people come our way? Will we creatively care for our eldest? Will we support our caregivers? Will we have a children's Sunday School again?

We also may be thinking about the many refugees who are risking lives to get to our borders, only to have their children torn from their arms while they face months or even years in prison; we may be thinking about the diseases that stalk us, the addictions that threaten. We may be thinking of political scandals and presidential travels. And none of us is spared our own personal issues – health, family, finances and on and on.

In the midst of the joy of the foreground and the Angst of the background, we listen to lessons today that have to do with trees! With seeds and green growing things. With green trees drying up and dry trees flourishing. With seeds growing into huge sprawling bushes. Thus, the color GREEN we will live with in the church for the coming months is totally appropriate! We fervently pray for GROWTH: green, healthy growth for this congregation, our children, our spiritual lives, and for growth in wisdom and will for those seeking to solve the difficult challenges of poverty, hunger, war and treatment of refugees and prisoners.

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How does it work???

How do little kids grow up to graduate high school!? How do we become leaders and teachers in our congregation? How do men faithfully raise and mentor children “in this day and age?” How do people stay married for fifty years, for one year?

How can the writer of our second lesson talk about Christ as our Judge practically in the same breath as talking of the love of Christ and that in Christ we are a new creation? If it's all about grace, why does the writer talk of our receiving recompense for what we have done during our lives?

And, by the way, how DOES that seed grow into grain, that mustard seed or rhododendron into a large shrub, a tall tree?

Whew! I should sit down right now and say AMEN and let you go home to ponder these mysteries and glorify God. These lessons are not easy. Mark tells us Jesus taught in parables and only explained them to his disciples.

Don't you often wish Jesus would explain it all to us?

Difficult texts give the Holy Spirit a chance to impart insight and to strengthen us to love God and serve others.

The second lesson's focus on judgment reminds us that God desires us to think and to do that which is right! We know that, but we sometimes forget that our lives have moral significance and real meaning. What we do – matters.

Jesus' puzzling parables put us in our proper place. Not understanding how God works reminds us of our need to trust God. Jesus has not explained everything to us. The Bible has not given us a list of the right techniques, the right programs, the right answers as to how to make our church attendance skyrocket, how to best hand faith on to our children, exactly how to support a new pastor, or even how to "keep on keeping on" each day.

But -- Jesus came to us not just as a teacher who told puzzling parables. He came to challenge death. Crucified, died, buried. And on the third day to be raised. Alleluia! Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed.* He becomes for us sinners and puzzled ones a shelter, a rock, a brother. When God sees me through Jesus' eyes, I need not fear judgment. Christ **is** the center, model and hope for our lives. His holying Spirit guides and directs us in day-to-day decisions and life.

Jesus talks about a field of seed growing, he says, “of itself.” He says that is how the Reign of God works as well. Farmers and Christians do not need to know HOW the grain grows, how the work of God actually happens. Can any of us explain how the petals of a flower open or how a person comes to faith? How a young baby grows into a delightful high school graduate? Rather than worry about getting answers to these questions, we just delight in the bountiful goodness of God. The seed doesn’t grow all by itself. Both farmers and Christians work hard. The ever-creating God works a miracle with every growing plant – with every growing child – with every growing spirit.

Such wonder and beauty does not let the farmer or the church rest and wait. The farmer works patiently day by day, watering, fertilizing, and he “goes in with his sickle” to harvest. Teachers show up every week to show God’s love in what they teach. Fathers, mothers, grandparents and many others patiently nurture, struggle, teach, pray, nurse, drive, cook, and finance the work of bringing up children.

The church gathers, disperses into the world, gathers again. People who had a dream for offering medical care to those with limited means began small and slowly the mustard seed dream grew into the Sequim free medical clinic. People today are working together to make real the mustard seed vision of affordable housing on our land. Faithful people from this church spend hours of dedicated service keeping our church finances, physical plant, worship services and office running smoothly.

“How does it work?” may be the wrong question.

“Why does it work?” That one we can answer. ***Because God wills good for this world and God wills to join us to the goodness of Christ.***

We don’t need to understand HOW it all works, but we know that the One who makes it work is faithful and true. Such goodness is a mystery – not to be solved but to be celebrated! Great trees, great shrubs, great sharing of love and generosity.

You graduates, Samantha and Summer, you teachers, fathers, all who act as fathers and grandfathers to children, you kids, you married people of five years or fifty, single seekers, gardeners, worriers, workers

and forgiven saints are part of the great, growing, season-of green-growth tree, this Body of Christ, this Kingdom, this Kin-dom of God!

Thanks be to God and praise to the Lord, the gardener and nurturer of our souls! Amen.

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