

Proper 6B
St. Mark 4:26-34
June 17, 2018
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

Seeds

He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

Jesus, we are told, taught in parables. These were stories you had to think about and process before you understood what was being said. It is a way of learning that might be more successful than merely passing out all the answers directly, that would be all too soon forgotten by his listeners. You can remember a story, and it is also helpful to remember the moral of the story, and therefore, you will keep it with you longer.

Advertisements that are most effective are mini stories burned in our memories that we remember on encountering a product in the store. Even more effective, advertisers discovered, is the subtle product placement in films and TV shows, in the midst of a story we can identify with, that will sow the seed for identifying with a product later. You would not put a product in the kitchen of a serial killer and hope to sell it. However, in a family comedy which the audience feels good about, the product may be remembered fondly. These are seeds sown well in the mind with some fertile memories.

Seeds are powerful producers when they are sown on fertile ground and nurtured through experience. They grow in us. However, as Jesus suggests in the parable this morning, we do not always know where, how and when the seeds will grow, but we can tell when they come to fruition, if we are around to observe their growth and maturity. God is always there watching the seeds grow that God planted.

The Gospel of Jesus is like that also: casting seed out into the world, not knowing where it will land and take root. Sermons can be ways to do that. Still, stories are even more effective.

We do not know how our efforts and words are always received, but sometimes we have a bigger impact than we realize. The seed will take root and grow into a large bush that produces fruit of its own, from which still others may eat and be nourished. Here is a story for example:

The Parable of the Petulant Priest

There once was a young priest who discounted the monastic life. He told himself that these were merely a group of people retreating from the real world and real ministry to the poor and needy that the Lord commanded us to do. How dare they run off to the woods to escape the demands of ministry! This young man had a wise teacher who taught him many things about love, relationships and ministry. The young priest looked up to his teacher and wanted to be like him

and to help people the way he did. He even thought about joining his profession. The teacher talked about his relationship to an Episcopal religious order, [yes we have those] located on the Hudson River in West Park, New York, far from urban noise and life. (It was everything the know-it-all young priest despised and railed against!)

The teacher talked about how he went there for regular visits and how it effected his prayer and spiritual life, The teacher commended it to the young priest to try. Perhaps, he said, it was just the thing that he needed. And so, about a year and a half later, the young priest grudgingly fulfilled the prompt to visit the monastery on the Hudson. But he had a plan: he made reservations at a nearby motel, so he could “retreat” to a safe place, and escape the “horrible” monastery after visiting briefly, pulling a big face, and confirming his assumptions and suspicions about monastic life and ministry.

Well, when the day came to visit, he stepped into the centuries old edifice, ready to execute his escape plan, just so he could say he “tried it.” However, upon entering he discovered something quite different: it was like a home-coming. The place was so full of God’s presence, he could feel it and sense the Spirit as he walked around the place. The spiritual ambiance, the regular round of prayers and the daily office chanted 4 times a day in the simple chapel, and most of all, the silence in the monastery touched his soul deeply. The place and the people there were steeped in prayer. He was converted by the experience, and realized the other half of being a Christian that he was missing. The seed took root. It would not be the last time he visited this place, in fact he even went and stayed with the monks for several months much later on. The seed, which the teacher had sown, had taken root. And much later on, he followed the teacher into his chosen profession and learned to also help people in the same way. What was so special about the teacher was how he combined spirituality with psychology, treating the whole person. This is a lesson not lost on the student.

And what lessons can we learn from this short story? I think it is about the foolishness and overconfidence and prejudices of the young man who closed his mind and spirit to an important part of ministry he was missing, without which, his ministry would never be truly fruitful or different from other activism going on in the world. It is a lesson to be relearned and reminded in the life of every Christian. Ministry is about advocating for what is just and right, but it is also about sharing and expressing the love of God to the world. You cannot communicate a love you do not know, unless you are steeped in, soaked in prayer and the words of God expressed as seeds in the scriptures. If you do not nurture the seeds, it is as though they fell into rocky soil and laid dormant, unspouted and certainly not alive. We must swallow them, read, mark and inwardly digest them, as the prayer says. Then what seems small and inconsequential as a mustard seed will take root and be fruitful in your life, your ministry and your world.

God spoke to us in parables so that we would remember their teachings. Parables today that teach the best come from students who have learned in life experience. If you haven’t already guessed, I am, or should I say was, the Petulant Priest! Amen.