Weeds for the Kingdom

Pentecost 4B

Mark 4: 26-34 Russell Mitchell-Walker

The last few years I have been waging a battle in our garden and yard against Purple Bell Flower which is an invasive weed that is very difficult to get rid of. I have learned that just pulling them up does not get rid of them as they have very tiny roots that connect to a large tuberous root, which is sometimes a foot or more deep in the ground. So, a little hand shovel does not cut it, one needs a full-sized spade! They are hardy as well because most weed killer does not work on it. Some people think it is a pretty flower and it does have a nice flower when it blooms. As a result people plant it but then it takes over, not only in your yard but your neighbours’ as well.

The mustard plant that Jesus talks about in todays scripture parables, is also quite an invasive plant. So, in essence, Jesus is saying the Kingdom of God is like a weed. For us it would be like saying the Kingdom of God is like a dandelion, or a Purple Bell Flower! How could that be? No one really likes weeds. Although there are some who rave about things like dandelion wine and dandelion tea. And I’ve already mentioned that the Purple Bell Flower is quite pretty. So maybe the Kingdom of God is about seeing beauty where others do not. Jesus also says the mustard seed grows into a large tree where birds plant their nests. This is also hard to believe because a mustard plant, which Jesus is talking about would usually not grow big enough to hold a nest, just like our mustard here in Saskatchewan. He is also playing with this image to contrast it to a passage in Ezekiel 17 that talks about a cedar tree as the nation of Israel who will nest all nations of birds but whose pride will be its downfall. Jesus is contrasting the powerful nations to the Kingdom of God which is not going to be like the mighty trees or empires of former times, which grew through military power and violence. The Kingdom of God, like a mustard seed or a weed, will be pervasive and subversive in standing for love and justice, with roots that go deep to embed that love and justice in the lives of those who are part of the shalom community. Those who are a part of this kingdom will be the bane of the existence of the systems that oppress and cause injustice in the society. All will be welcome to find shade, home and nest in this shalom community of love and justice.

Birds of all kinds are able to find a home in God’s Kingdom. As an Affirming Ministry, we planted seeds 11 years ago to be an intentional, welcoming community to all, especially 2 Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (2SLGBTQ) folk. Those seeds have seen growth and bore fruit in many ways. I am grateful to Kacey Colibaba who started attending our online services this past year, who shares with us in this video how Eastside has been for them a safe, sheltering place. Kacey’s pronouns, are they/them/theirs.

(*create link from video in shared Drive; June 13)*

We give thanks for the ways we can be a safe home for those who are queer. It is one way we create space that may be like the shalom community of God. And we know we are always learning what it means to create safer space and be welcoming. As the City council prepares legislation to Ban 2SLBGTQ conversion practices in the city we are working together with other Affirming Ministries and faith communities to be a voice of love and inclusion among the loud voices of those who want to continue to suppress and repress the identities of 2SLGBTQ folk. We will be pervasive, persistent, deeply rooted in the love and justice of Christ. We will work to be like the mustard seed, creating space for those who need shelter, a nest, a home, safe from the oppression and injustice, when it doesn’t seem possible.

We are like the mustard seed when we welcome those who have been excluded or rejected because of their sexual or gender identity.

We are like the mustard seed when we show love is stronger than hate and speak up against racism and white supremacy

We are like the mustard seed when we open ourselves to listen to painful stories of residential school survivors and allow our feelings to move us to acts of reconciliation such as supporting finding other unmarked graves.

We are like the mustard seed when we support banning 2SLGBTQ conversion efforts.

We are like the mustard seed when we support guaranteed living income as part of the new normal.

We are like the mustard seed when we stand in solidarity with the Muslim community in their pain, and calling for education about Islamophobia, and stronger laws against hate crimes.

We are like the mustard seed when we provide support accommodation and access for those with disabilities.

We are like the mustard seed when we challenge the status quo that maintains injustice and inequity.

As we sow seeds of love and justice that work toward reconciliation and inclusion, we know that God is working miracles behind the scenes as the seeds germinate and grow. That is the first parable in our reading today, that when we plant a seed, it changes from something dead to something that is alive and growing, until it is ready to harvest. May the seeds we plant grow to a harvest of love that overcomes hate, death, and injustice and creates a community where all can find safety and shelter who need it.