

6.17.18 Trusting in a Planted Seed

Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15

Mark 4:26-34

There are two things that stand out for me in the two parables we read this week in Mark. One, “The earth produces on its own.” Two, the image of a mustard plant to describe the Kingdom of God. Jesus did not use the image of mighty redwoods or cedars of Lebanon.

First we are told. We just plant the seeds we've been given. We tell stories. We offer genuine invitations. We share joy and pain. We do our part. But we do not get to decide which seeds will grow into towering trees and which will rot in the soil.

Second we are given the image of a mustard seed and a mustard plant. God's reign isn't like any ordinary seed. In some ways it resembles a *mustard* seed. This is not the kind of crop most people would sow. Where Jesus lived, mustard was prolific like a common and sturdy weed. It could pop up almost anywhere and start multiplying. Some of Jesus' listeners must have groaned or chuckled. Imagine Jesus speaking today and saying the Kingdom of God is like thistles or ground-ivy. But *bigger* and more useful since mustard has a range of medicinal qualities and tastes good on hot dogs. In any case, the reign of God apparently isn't much of a cash crop. Yet *it grows*. It is not easily eradicated. Good luck keeping it out of your well-manicured garden or your farmland. Better be careful what you pray for when you say, “Your kingdom come...”

Jesus describes the fully grown mustard plant as “the greatest of all shrubs.” At this point, some of his listeners probably laughed out loud. It can grow dense, but it is hardly magnificent. Jesus must be grinning as he speaks. He is not aiming to impart insights about the relative worth of shrubberies but to shock people into a new way of perceiving greatness.

The humor and the absurdity are part of the main point. Jesus could have likened God's reign to the cedars of Lebanon if he wanted to give an image people would be impressed by. Instead he describes something more ordinary, and yet also something more able to show up, to take over inch by inch, and eventually to transform a whole landscape. Fussy people might deem this uninvited plant to be too much of a good thing. Others might consider it a nuisance, but what about those who, like the birds, need a home where they can be safe? They will be happy.

The reign of God will mess with established boundaries and conventional values. Like a fast-replicating plant, it will get into everything. It will bring life and color to desolate places. It will crowd out other concerns. It will resist our manipulations. Its humble appearance will expose and mock pride and pretentiousness.

I think this parable gives us a challenge and a promise. We have seeds to scatter. Seeds like sharing the truth that God's grace is more powerful than all that seeks to divide or separate us. We have seeds to scatter of compassion and mercy and justice in the community and far beyond. We have seeds to scatter that tell of a church that is large enough for people on all ends of every spectrum. We have seeds to scatter that tell of a God who is still alive and active in the world and in our lives. What marvelous seeds you have been given to sow. You can leave your seeds in your pocket or choose to scatter them only with discrimination or fear. What a loss to the community and to the work of the kingdom if we don't plant our seeds and trust God to grow them as God wills.

Think about it – Pray about it – Live it

Bob