

Pastor Kevin Garman

Theme: Sowers of Seeds

Scripture: Mark 4:26-34

June 20th, 2021 Father's Day

Last week, we looked at Paul's description of new life in Christ in his second letter to the church of Corinth as they continued to struggle with unity and togetherness as the Body of Christ. We looked at how Christ brought not only a new cycle of creation into the world through his life, death, and resurrection, but Jesus also called for a new way of being and seeing one another in the world. If you haven't figured it out at this point, Creation and the connection of God to nature is one of my favorite topics, and this week's gospel reading certainly made it easy for me to discuss this theme once again. However, the question we wrestle with this week is a little different because we ask the question, how do sow seeds for the Kingdom of God and what seeds are we sowing as we build the Kingdom of God?

As I said on Mother's Day, Father's Day can be a day of celebration for many and a day of pain and difficulty for others. I struggle with Father's Day and celebrating it because of my relationship, or lack thereof, with my father. However, the older I've got the more I have appreciated our journey of reconciliation together. It took years of hard work and many years of silence for the seeds of reconciliation to grow in each of us, but it led us to a place where just before my father's death in April 2017, he and I were both able to say, "I love you and I'm sorry for any pain I've caused you in my life." Most times in our relationship building, I questioned why I was even attempting to plant seeds of reconciliation with a man who had harmed not only me, but a man who had harmed some of the people I cared most about in this world. However, as time healed each of us, my faith forced me to never give up on the unforgivables of this world and the world is made up of many Dale Wade Garman's who have burned bridges with their families, friends, and communities. It is my job and my calling to love those people and help plant the seeds of healing and reconciliation in their hearts. It was through life lessons both of my Grandpa's, who are my fathers, taught me as I grew up that led me to this point in my life.

Grandpa Garman taught me discipline and diligence. Grandpa Garman would have loved Montana, and sometimes when I speak to some of you old

timers here, I see Kenneth Garman in your eyes, your speech, and your grit. Grandpa Garman was a World War II veteran, a man who could build anything with just a hammer and a few nails, he loved John Wayne movies, well about any Western movie, tv show, or book, and only watched three things on his television, Westerns, professional wrestling, and THE Ohio State College Football team. However, even in that grit and stoic face of Kenneth Garman, he was a big teddy bear who did everything for his family.

As you watched westerns on Saturday weekend visits, Grandpa Garman would allow us grandkids to cuddle up next to him as he smoked his favorite cigar or pipe tobacco. Grandpa Garman did not have much of a desire to think about complex issues or problems in the world, but if it was a family issue, then he was more than willing to oblige as he loved us all. Grandpa Garman taught me how to shoot a gun, how to fish, although to this day I am a terrible angler, and most importantly, how to have a tough heart and a tender heart all at the same time. Even after the terrible things my father had said and done to him and Grandma, he still went to his deathbed trying to plant seeds of reconciliation between he and his baby boy's relationship.

Grandpa Leuck, or as we call him, Papa, is much of the same person yet in an entirely different way. My family and I joke about Papa, my Uncle Steve, and me all being the same person born into a different generation. Partially this is due to the three of us being nearly unrecognizable when we stand next to one another and in some family photos, the only way you can tell is by the year and who has the most hair in the picture. Papa's greatest lesson was teaching me my passion for learning. I was considering dropping out of college altogether because I felt ashamed for dropping my music major and felt like I had lost direction and purpose as I questioned my call to ministry. As we were all sitting around the supper table on our usual Sunday afternoon meal in Tennessee, Papa said this to me, "You're too darn smart to quit now. Just stick with it and be patient. Everything will fall into place the way it needs to, but you started this journey so finish it. There is no such thing as wasted time when you learn something about yourself."

Papa and his side of the Leuck family tree is where I get my musical talents from with Papa only recently quitting singing. He sang baritone and tenor for decades as he sang in many barbershop quartets and choirs over the years and was always a devout singer in the church choir as well. Papa taught me music is a wonderful conduit of expression and a way to process bigger ideas in a different way. Although Papa and I share a deep love for various forms of music, we are polar opposites in almost every other way

ranging from our personalities, political views, interpretations on scripture, and how we see the future of our country and world playing out, but through these differences, he has taught me humility, compassion, tenderness, and the importance and passion of continuously learning new things. If you were only to see a snapshot of both of these men's lives, you may question how I gleaned such lessons from them, but isn't that true of each of our lives? If we only saw each other's sins, mistakes, and blemishes, then wouldn't we realize we are all in need of seeds of reconciliation in our own lives?

This is the purpose of today's gospel lesson and one of the many meanings to glean from this parable of the mustard seed. The seeds planted in our lives are never apparent at first glance. We are always waiting in anticipation to see what the seeds will grow into. This parable teaches us an important lesson that is still vitally important to today. If we nourish, tend to, and take care of those seeds planted in our hearts, minds, and lives, then more often than not, I believe we will be surprised to see what those seeds blossom and bloom into as they grow and burst forth from our soul.

²⁶ He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸ The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come." (NRSV).

The first word that stands out to me is scatter. The descriptor here doesn't say "Someone would carefully, neatly place seed on the ground," nor does it read, "Someone would wait until the perfect, opportune moment to carefully plant the seed on the ground" The seeds are scattered. I am sure there is some relative order to how to scatter these seeds, but it certainly contradicts the typical image I see of a seed planter carefully and cautiously planting each seed. Now maybe I have just romanticized the notion of farming or the wisdom that farmers can offer us, but I have always revered the people who grow my food, plant my food, nurture my food, and harvest my food. In my experience, regardless of our differences in life, they are most selfless, humble individuals this world has to offer. There is something sacred and innate about the wisdom of people who spend their lives growing other things for people. However, this verse says not even the farmer knows how these seeds grow.

In verse 28, it speaks about this growth of the seed into a sapling, a young plant, eventually it becomes a mature, fully grown plant ready for harvest. The word used to describe this growth is translated as, "by itself," "of itself," or "automatically." I think this speaks to me by explaining growth

will happen without us even knowing it is taking place. As we talked about last week, growth can be a pretty painful and difficult process, but when you begin to see that growth, it can certainly brighten even the gloomiest of moods and circumstances as growth changes our perspective on life. Think of the verse in Ecclesiastes where it talks about a time for certain times in life. Growth is no different. There is a time for planting and a time for harvesting. A time for sowing seeds and a time for uprooting everything from the soil and starting afresh. A time for resting and a time for reaping. A time for sunlight and a time for watering. Growth happens automatically and growth continues through us nurturing growth in our lives and the lives of others.

³⁰ He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet 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.” (NRSV)

The notes of my Jewish Annotated New Testament Bible give a wonderful perspective on this parable. The editor speaks about how it is interesting that Jesus does not refer to the seeds in this parable as being seeds of great trees, for example, a cedar tree, which in the Bible is often used to describe the beginnings of great empires and great kingdoms being built. Instead, Jesus chooses the mustard seed, which is almost satirical and comical. It would be like me saying, “A mighty, powerful kingdom will be built by sowing seeds of tumbleweed!” That doesn’t sound mighty. Mustard plants are regarded as invasive shrubs that grow to only be a few feet high, so the kingdom of God is just a scraggly bush that people think is a nuisance? Maybe it is suggesting that the kingdom of God grows up from the weeds of life into something much more than the weed everyone else sees. (Jewish Annotated New Testament p 68).

³³ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; ³⁴ he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples. (NRSV)

Jesus greatest ability was his ability to communicate with all different types of people to facilitate all different types of growth. His friends were tax collectors, fisherman, widows, disabled people, people considered nothing but drunks, people consider nothing but untouchable or deemed worthless by society. Jesus’ greatest resource was building bridges between communities who may have never interacted with one another before they became a member of the Body of Christ. Jesus understood the Kingdom of

God, to grow to its fullest, requires everyone and everybody to meet each other where they are at, not where they want each other to be. Do you recall the parable of the lost sheep? Luke chapter 15:4-7 says this, ⁴ *“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?”* ⁵ *When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices.* ⁶ *And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’* ⁷ *Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”* (NRSV)

Planting seeds and seeing them grow is about liberation and freedom, just like the gospel. For me, this is best illustrated in a song from my favorite band, The Collection, called “The Gown of Green.” Here are the lyrics to that song.

Track 4 on album Ars Morendi, “The Gown of Green”

“I’m an anchor at the bottom of a lake longing for the ship from which I break. I won’t let nobody down, no, I won’t keep nobody grounded. You walked around and you planted seeds, your kingdom came up from among the weeds and the men all cried while staring at the trees saying, “what are we supposed to see?”

Well, I say you’ll see freedom. Stop looking at the ground, start looking at the leaves up among the dirt and rust is where the kingdom breathes. You’ll see freedom”

The Kingdom of God is not being built for the righteous, but the kingdom of God is being built for the Dale Wade Garman’s of this world who have outworn their welcome, who have scars, scrapes, and bruises visible for all to see, and for those who have been deemed untouchable, unsavable. But through the Gospel of Jesus Christ we know no one is ever seen as untouchable or unsavable through the eyes of Jesus.

The Kingdom of God is for the regulars at Oasis Bar/Shamrock Bar. The Kingdom of God is for the travelers, gig workers, and wanderers of El Centro Motel. The Kingdom of God calls the blue-collar workers of Runnings and Monte Carlo just as much as it calls the accounts of Stockman Bank and investors at Edward Jones. The Kingdom of God is for the ranchers and farmers who’ve tended to this land for generations just as much as it calls

the educators in each school system in each grade and education level. The Kingdom of God is for all God's creation beckoning us, nurturing us, planting us, and growing within each of us to experience the liberation and the freedom of the gospel.

As sowers of the seeds, it is merely our job to extend the invitation of the gospel for all to participate at the table of grace as we each grow our hearts, minds, and extend our doors to build the Kingdom of God. Always remember endurance doesn't mean perfection on the journey of life and we will certainly endure difficult times because our suffering is inevitable. However, always remember as well, that to build the Kingdom of God we must always keep the perspective of always forward, never backwards. Amen.

The longer we live,
The more of your presence
We find, laid down,
Weave upon weave
Within our lives.

The quiet constancy of your gentleness
Drew no attention to itself,
Yet filled our home
With a climate of kindness
Where each mind felt free
To seek its own direction.

As the fields of distance
Opened inside childhood,
Your presence was a sheltering tree
Where our fledgling hearts could rest.

The earth seemed to trust your hands
As they tilled the soil, put in the seed,
Gathered together the lonely stones.
Something in you loved to inquire
In the neighborhood of air,
Searching its transparent rooms
For the fallen glances of God.

The warmth and wonder of your prayer
Opened our eyes to glimpse
The subtle ones who
Are eternally there.

Whenever, silently, in off moments,
The beauty of the whole thing overcame you,
You would gaze quietly out upon us,
The look from your eyes
Like a kiss alighting on skin.

There are many things
We could have said,
But words never wanted
To name them;
And perhaps a world
That is quietly sensed
Across the air
In another's heart
Becomes the inner companion
To one's own unknown.

Poem: John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings*, (Doubleday, 2008)