

## Scripture

Ezekiel 17: 22-24

Psalm 92: 1 - 4, 11-14

2 Corinthians 5: 6- 19, 111-13, 14-17

Mark. 4: 26-34

## The Seeds of the Kingdom

When I was in fifth grade, my father taught Sunday School at the Presbyterian Church in Wilmington DE where I was baptized. He drilled into us the Ten Commandments - an exercise I was privileged to repeat when our daughter Kathryn was in Sunday School at Saint James. I taught her like my father taught me, the importance of honoring our mother and father.

One of my father's favorite parables was the parable of the Mustard Seed that we read from the Gospel of Mark. There is a randomness to this parable that I find fascinating.

“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 why.”

If you have ever planted a garden, you know the limits of what you can do. All plants are dependent on nature to grow - nutrients in the soil, water, sunlight - there is only so much we can do as humans to encourage plants to grow.

My sister and brother-in-law are farmers - they have grown wheat, soy beans and barley on vast acres of dry and arid land in northeastern Montana for more than 40 years. They know full well the limitations of what they can do as farmers. They are beholden to Mother Nature to not send locusts or hail, provide enough rain and sunshine so they can have a good harvest. When Nature is not cooperative, their harvest is lean and their income is slight.

They are very faithful people whose livelihood depends on elements outside their control.

The analogy to the smallest seed of all - the mustard seed - reminds us that even the smallest of us can be powerful when planted and our faith can take root.

The mustard seed grows into the mightiest shrub, with large branches that provide shady nests for birds.

Have you ever seen a mustard seed? When I was ordained to the priesthood my friends Jen and Heather gave me a mustard seed encased

in a necklace pendant. I was really touched by their gift - they said when they gave it to me, that the mustard seed reminded them of my faith which has endured many storms and challenges and yet continues to grow and bless others.

Where is the mustard seed of your faith? Can you recall who "planted" that seed in your heart? I am grateful to my parents who raised me as a Christian - and encouraged me to find my own faith tradition. I could not have known when my father was teaching me in Sunday School that the faith roots he helped nurture would blossom as an Episcopal priest. My father died in 2009, before I acknowledged my discernment to the priesthood. I believe that he knows I am serving God as a priest in the Episcopal Church - I give thanks to him daily for the gift of faith he imparted.

The power of God's abiding love is the gift we receive when we are faithful. By following God's commandments and abiding by God's love of mercy, justice, compassion and truth - we can accomplish great things with God who is the ultimate source of all light and life.

On this Father's Day, I encourage each of us to reflect on our fathers - no matter what type of relationship you may have or have had with your father - he helped bring you to life. Did he implant the seeds of faith in you? How can you encourage and nurture the seeds of faith in your own children and grandchildren?

Important questions to reflect on - and to pray about.

Beyond our biological fathers and step fathers, this is a day to give thanks to the ancestors of our faith. Prophets like Ezekiel, who tells us that God planted a tender young twig on the highest mountain that will produce limbs and bear fruit, growing into a mighty cedar where every kind of bird can live.

The Apostle Paul writes in his second letter to the people of Corinth, "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away, see everything has become new!" And the Psalmist reminds us that "the righteous will flourish like a palm tree."

The cycle of life continues even after our deaths. We are only here for a short time - it's incumbent upon us to plant seeds of faith that will develop strong roots to nurture the next generation of our offspring - and serve as a living witness to others of the sanctity of faith in Christ, through love of God, that can truly transform this broken and hurting world.

Amen.

Close with Father's Day prayer. The congregation's response is "Lord, Hear our Prayer"