

Proper 4 (9) 2nd Sunday after Pentecost - June 2, 2024

1 Corinthians 3:1–9 Mark 4:30–34

“Growing Seeds”

1. Ask someone for the names of those who have influenced them in their lives, and you’ll get a version of their personal Hall of Fame
 - a. For example, a professional athlete will mention their high school and college coaches
 - b. An actor or poet or artist will mention not only their own teachers, but perhaps the influence of the greats in their respective fields
 - c. You and I may credit our teachers, mentors, relatives, friends
 - i. for teaching us important lessons,
 1. From our parents showing us right from wrong
 2. Even to grandma teaching us her meatball recipe
 - ii. for being ready to offer us a listening ear or a shoulder to cry on
 - iii. for answering our questions and for supporting us in our journey to continue to learn
 - d. All those people participate in our growth, in big and small ways
 - i. Truly some planted a seed in us, an idea that we could be anything we wanted to be when we grew up, or an idea that we would make an impact in the life of the community
 - ii. But it probably wasn’t just one seed, really.
 - iii. How many of us grew up with one dream, and along the way circumstances or maturity or life itself uprooted one seed to plan another
 - e. I’m a terrible gardener, so I feel ill equipped to take this analogy too far
 - i. Of course I know that for that seed to grow it requires good soil, water, sun, fertilizer
 - ii. That seed, well-tended and loved, should have the opportunity to bear fruit
2. Our passages for today help us think of how faith and community, like growing seed, grow and develop
 - a. Paul sounded pretty frustrated in the letter he was writing to the Corinthians
 - i. As a follower of Jesus, and as a preacher sharing the message of Jesus, Paul had gone to preach in the city of Corinth, in Greece.
 1. There he had helped establish a new community of believers who had accepted the Gospel which Jesus was himself preaching
 2. But since Paul was a traveling preacher, he left the young congregation in the hands of leaders he had helped develop
 3. Some time later, another traveling preacher, Apollos, also came and preached in the area, building on the work that Paul had started
 - ii. The trouble was that the Corinthians were dealing with some divisions, which found a ready-made separation which they clung to:
 1. They began to see their spiritual mentors as competitors, and so they saw themselves as followers forming into factions

2. A scholar thinks it didn't have to do with presenting different teachings, but perhaps more with preaching / teaching style
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/sixth-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-1-corinthians-31-9-5>
- iii. Paul, unfortunately, first shames them by saying that their faith hadn't grown as much as it should, and that they were being immature in the way they were dealing with this situation
- iv. But then he makes the more important point, that is, that like a seed, one person had planted it (Paul) and another had watered it (Apollos) but all along it was God who was offering the growth
- v. The ones who sowed and watered are servants, nothing more, but it is only God who makes a difference in that situation
- b. Jesus, in trying to give an example of what the Realm of God was like, takes the insignificantly small mustard seed to show the mysterious, surprising and nurturing qualities of how God runs things
 - i. The mustard seed is an unexpected image.
 - ii. Yet Jesus seems to relish the idea of stumping us with examples that don't seem to make sense
 - iii. It doesn't seem to make sense that the rule of God, the establishment of God's justice and love would be compared to something so insignificant
 - iv. Yet part of the appeal of the image is how easily dismissed it can be at first
 - v. In this example, that seed of the realm of God grows to the point of being great, of being a place of refuge and safety.
 - vi. More than that, apparently a mustard seed would grow and as a shrub unpredictably crowd out already planned crops, perhaps implying that the realm of God would crowd out the tyranny of the Roman Empire, in a sneaky, unexpected way.
3. The seed which gave birth to this church was planted 200 years ago, and reflecting on its growth, our bicentennial celebration focuses on what is yet to come
 - a. We have been looking back into our stories, remembering church leaders who have come before us, like today after Jordan's reception Janet Lowery will help us remember Bill and Ellen Laws
 - b. We certainly have been thinking about a sort of Hall of Faith, if you would, those who have come before us who have influenced us in our spiritual growth
 - c. And as we look at the next 200 years, we ponder the legacy of that small seed growing, how it impacts the lives of people in our community
 - i. We ponder what fruit the seeds we're planting today will produce, a seed our future members will keep watering, like the Bicentennial Legacy Fund which will help neighbors with grants investing in their education, capacity, dreams of self-sufficiency, growth as community leaders
 - ii. We look back at the seeds FPC planted years ago here which gave fruit as Housing Partners Inc (HPI) now Thrive Alliance, and today we're planting new seeds to advocate for housing for the most vulnerable in the form of Permanent Supportive Housing

- iii. And like that there are other initiatives in the works, and others we've yet to imagine, which will be seeds planted, and those who come after us will water and celebrate the fruit created
4. Whether we're planting or watering those seeds, we are looking forward to how God's full reign of God (with this church as a tiny part of it) is able to be offer spiritual branches where people will find the safety and space to nest and thrive.

Sources:

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-11-2/commentary-on-mark-426-34-6>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-11-2/commentary-on-mark-426-34-2>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/sixth-sunday-after-epiphany/commentary-on-1-corinthians-31-9-5>