

Deeds & Ideas
Mark 4:26-34 / II Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17
Colebrook Congregational Church
Ordinary 11 / June 14, 2015

Today's selection comes from the beginning of Jesus' ministry according to Mark. In the previous chapter, we see Jesus and His multiple arguments with the scribes over Sabbath-day issues. The following chapter is full of stories of Jesus healing people. And this chapter, is all parables, and they're all about seeds.

These two parables, the Growing Seed and the Mustard Seed, are both very short, and are usually grouped together, both being about the Kingdom of God and germination. The first one is about the secret and mystery of growth, and the second one contrasts between small beginnings and great results. To me, I see that these two parables are about deeds and ideas.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed is also found in the Gospels of Matthew & Luke. However, those two Gospels omit the Parable of the Growing Seed in their editions. The differences between the three versions are minor, but the comparison does help to reveal who the Gospel writers' audiences were. Luke mentions that the mustard seed is planted in the garden. Rabbinical commentary on this parable points out that mustard was not planted in gardens, but in a way that today we would call an orchard. That helps us to see that Luke's community is not Jewish, and that Mark & Matthew are Jewish, or at least a mix of both.

The first of the parables, the Parable of the Growing Seed, describes a farmer scattering seeds and then trusting in God to make the seeds grow, and then harvesting the crop at the appropriate time.

We are the sower, the farmer. We seed with our faith, seed by our good works in the service of God through serving others, and then we go to sleep, trusting patiently in our Creator God for the time of growth. God, in ways we may not fathom, will encourage the growth that results from our faithful seeding of good works. We must then be ready for the harvest!

Then there is the Parable of the Mustard Seed, where the Kingdom of God is

likened to a mustard seed, the smallest seed, but then, it grows into the greatest of the shrubs, with large branches that provides shade and gives home to many birds.

Scholars think that the type of mustard seed in this parable was of the higher-yielding black mustard seed variety, which starts off only 1 or 2 mm in diameter. [gesture] But then it can grow up to 9 ft tall!

While the mission of Jesus and His Disciples in its infancy may have seemed small like that seed to them, Jesus is telling them that even though their work seemed so small compared to needs of the world, it will grow and be a comfort to all who seek its sanctuary.

To me, this parable is also about ideas. An idea starts small. Just a thought, or a jot on a scrap of paper, but from that, it can grow, into something massive and amazing.

I watch a lot of YouTube videos produced by BuzzFeed, which are mostly sociological in nature, and are also rather funny. There was one that I saw a couple days ago that was about how an idea comes to fruition. Out in the Oceans, there is a lot of garbage floating around, and most have accumulated due to the ocean currents in the middle of five gyres. The largest is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, which is twice the size of Texas. Most of the garbage there is recyclable, and there is some program to do so somewhere in the world...except for fishing nets. Fishing nets are just discarded in the ocean, becoming a hazard to wildlife and commerce alike. There are these two guys, who started with an idea to address that one thing that no one else has done anything about. No one could recycle it, so they came up with an idea to repurpose it instead. They developed a way to break the nets down and cast them into fish-shaped skateboards. They now go around buying the old nets from fishing boats in the Pacific Rim, so they are not being added to the garbage patches. Their idea started small, but it is growing into something greater.

During Confirmation Class last Wednesday night, we were going over Congregational history. When we came to the early eighteenth century, we

discussed Jonathan Edwards and his idea of disinterested benevolence. Prior to this, our churches were first focused on surviving persecution, and then, when they were free to live as they wished, they focused inwardly on their identity. After Edwards came to prominence during the Great Awakening, he preached that believers and the churches should be engaged in serving others without thought of reward. His idea started off small like a seed in Northampton, but then we could see its growth with the spread of benevolence societies that started with addressing local concerns, and eventually reaching across the globe, faithfully cultivated, creating a great harvest.

A few months ago, at a Church Council meeting, Sheila presented a spreadsheet of ideas that she found from a workshop that this church held many years ago. We should revisit that, because those ideas can be like mustard seeds. We should sow them faithfully, and entrust their growth to God. Our works from those ideas could grow massive and amazing and do so much good for everyone! And by doing so, I believe, we WILL grow!

Prayers of the People

[PAUSE]

We praise your abiding guidance, O God, for you sent us Jesus, our Teacher and Messiah, to model for us the way of love for the whole universe. We offer these prayers of love on behalf of ourselves and our neighbors, on behalf of your creation and our fellow creatures.

God of mercy and healing, you who hear the cries of those in need, receive these petitions of your people that all who are troubled may know peace, comfort, and courage. We pray for:

Loving God, open our ears to hear your word and draw us closer to you, that the whole world may be one with you as you are one with us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

