

Lectionary 11/Proper 6 (B)
June 14, 2009
Text: Mark 4:26-34

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A week ago when it was so warm and beautiful and the sun was shining, we got to spend the better part of the weekend outside in the garden. It was great. I dug dark, rich compost down into soil, and it had a strong, earthy smell to it. We planted pumpkins and zucchini and yellow squash, and carrots and cucumbers and lettuce and chard. Everything is in neat little rows, marked with little sticks poked in the ground at each end. Already I can see some of the little plants poking up out of the ground, a promise of great things to come later in the summer.

There's something wonderful about playing in the garden. It's not just that we'll enjoy all of these things on our table—lettuce for salads, steamed vegetables, and pumpkin pie. There's also something amazing about making things grow. Start with dirt and water and sun, and these seeds can do incredible things. Big, flat pumpkin seeds, or teeny, tiny carrot seeds—it's almost magical how the seeds sprout roots and push up leaves. And each kind of seed knows how to grow its own way, with its own characteristic colors and shapes.

Jesus uses the image of seeds planted in the ground to invite us to imagine what the reign of God is like. What does it look like when God is at work in the world, making things right, healing and restoring the human family and all of creation? It looks like someone scattering seeds on the ground. And then they went about the everyday tasks of life. They got up in the morning and went about their day. In the evening they went to bed and slept through the night. And while they were going about living, those seeds would sprout and grow. The person who planted the seeds has no idea how the seeds make a plant, or how the plant produces grain. But it does. It's a mystery that happens right under their nose, until the grain is ripe and ready to be harvested, so that it can be a gift for life.

This is such a wonderful and beautiful image for us today. It's Confirmation Sunday, and we celebrate with Nick and Madeleine and Peter. As they affirm their baptisms, we as a congregation rejoice in the faith that has been growing in them, and recognize that they aren't little kids any longer, but are ready to take a more active role in the life we share as people of God. So Kathy and Dave, Becky and Bill, Michelle and Robert—years ago you planted seeds when you brought Nick and Madeleine and Peter to church to be baptized. You made a commitment to water those seeds by bringing them to church, by modeling the faith for them, by teaching them how to pray, teaching them about being a follower of Jesus. And then you went about the every-

day tasks of life. And right there under your nose, a mystery was happening. Those seeds were growing. Only God knows how it happens.

Nick and Madeleine and Peter, you've been growing in faith, and you're not just little children any more. Through the past couple of years you've had the chance to explore some of the basics of faith in Confirmation class. And today, as you affirm your faith, this congregation will welcome you into a deeper level of participation in the life and mission we share as the community of Jesus. I hope you won't feel insulted, though, if I compare you to those little sprouts in my garden that are just now opening new leaves to soak up the sun. God has a lot of growing for you still to do. But really that's true for all of us. Whether we measure our journey in faith in terms of weeks or years or decades, we're still reaching for a fullness of life and faithfulness that we haven't attained yet. And the Spirit of God is at work in our lives in hidden, mysterious ways to help us grow strong in faith, to trust God's love, so that our lives begin to show the fruits of compassion and generosity and service and love. And we, for our part, continue to open our hearts and minds to the rich soil of holy scripture and the refreshing rain of prayer and the warm sunshine of worship, so that we might soak up everything we need to grow deep roots and flourish, so our faith won't turn out to be a stunted, pitiful little thing but instead grow into something strong and vibrant and good.

There's a second story that Jesus tells about the reign of God. So what does it look like when God is at work in the world, making things right, healing and restoring the human family and all of creation? It looks like a teeny, tiny mustard seed—so small you can hardly see it. But when it grows up it's a great shrub, with waving, leafy branches, and birds can make their nests in its shade. Now, the thing about Jesus' stories is—there's always a surprise. And here's the surprise. Nobody plants mustard seeds because the mustard plant is a weed!

This amazing seed of life with God has been planted in your life. And the Spirit of God is at work in mysterious ways to make that seed grow—maybe when you're praying or reading the Bible, maybe when you're singing God's praise or serving a neighbor in need, or maybe when you're just going to sleep at night and waking up in the morning and going about the ordinary routines of life. The Spirit of God is nurturing and coaxing up growth in you, to grow something beautiful and amazing, something that looks like Jesus' way of love and compassion and forgiveness, something that will grow to maturity and will be a source of blessing, something that will give life.

But the world around us looks at us and thinks, "It's a weed!" And all too often people will try to pull up that weed, to get rid of it, to make you feel "weird" for being a Christian, to judge you as some sort of fanatic. It's one of

the reasons this community is so important, because here that seed of faith is treasured and tenderly cared for. Nick, Madeleine and Peter, this community is like rich, moist soil, and you always have a place here. Here you are loved and valued—each and every person here is loved and valued and belongs.

I pray that you—all of you—will know how precious that seed is, that seed of life with God that the Spirit is nurturing and helping to grow. I pray that you'll live with boldness, as God's person in the world, that you'll have courage in the face of being treated like a weed. And I pray that you will mature and grow strong, that your life will bear beautiful fruit of love and truth and service; that your faith will grow broad, generous leaves to make the sort of safe and peaceful space that gives life for you and for all those who are part of your life. Thanks be to God. Amen