

Pentecost 2B, proper 11

Lections: 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13; Ps. 20; 2 Corin. 5:6-17; Mark 4:26-34

The opening show and tell for kids was this illustration: an apple is cut in half crosswise and I asked “how many seeds in an apple?” We explored this a little bit and then I asked “how many apples in a seed?” One answer was great for my purposes in the sermon: “infinite, because each tree produces many apples and other trees and the true answer is a mystery.”

Mystery of the growth of the seed is how one commentator speaks about the parable of the sower that Jesus says is an illustration of the kingdom or commonwealth of God. Humanity is meant to wonder at the mystery of growth since that belongs to God. In fact, humanity doesn't appear in seeding or soil time but only at harvest time. This is part of unconventional wisdom, a way that Jesus invites his listeners into going deeper into the realm of God.

Conventional wisdom tells us that for something to grow we must prepare – buy a gardening book, study the soil, provide good resources. God's wisdom is that the unknown and unseen source is the mystery of growth, in the world and in us. Conventional wisdom says that small is small, you get what you pay for, what you see is what you get, dead things stay dead. In the lessons for today we get a glimpse of God's wisdom: the small boy is chosen to be anointed as the next king of the people of God, the unexpected happens – a small seed produces a very large bush, enough to shelter new and winged life. Here, we are told, is an economy of grace. Here is an important garden story. Like the infinity of apples, our imagination tells us about the deep mystery of God's work.

This week very early – arriving at diocesan house at 4:30 am – some of us joined Bishop John Chapman and Bishop Terry Findlay, representing our Primate, to participate in a sunrise service on Victoria Island remembering the anniversary of the apology from the government for the abuses of the residential schools. The morning was full of generosity in smudging, strawberries, smoking the peace pipe, prayers and song, sharing time and bannock and fresh fruit. Our bishops gave retiring national chief, Phil Fontaine, a chalice. At outward glance, this ceremony and its gift were small things and the mystery is underneath, in what growth God may give here.

I had a trinity of conversations – with an angry elder who did not want white people, especially church people present; with a healing elder who is a survivor of the residential schools and who scooped me up for breakfast and conversation with him; a young teacher of adolescents in an alternative high school on Parkdale where the needs of Metis, Inuit and First Nations youth are valued. Small seeds, really, where God will enable what is to be harvested. One might ask what kind of a gift is a chalice? Its value in light of today's texts might be in what is imagined it contains: hope, truth-telling, healing, trust, and reconciliation. A shelter for the safety of all is a holy possibility.

Jesus, steeped in the ancient wisdom traditions, was for me not primarily a teacher of information, telling people what to believe. Nor do I see him as primarily a teacher of morality, telling folks how to behave. I see him as one who encourages and invites us on the path of transformation, challenging all of us to move from the wide and easy path of conventional wisdom and go deeper into the mystery of a life centered on and in the work of God.

Who would imagine, for example, that a small parish would have a heart big enough for everyone? Or that a classroom across the street at the Putnam school would set a goal of \$11,000 for a clinic, another well, and classroom resources for a village in w. Kenya? Can we be neighbors and partners in such a wonderful venture, beyond the \$4000 we were proud of raising in the U2charist for AIDS relief? Does small mean closed in, monochromatic, homogeneous, parochial, isolated? What is God doing with us on this church island in the neighborhood? What small seeds have been planted in faithful soil? Are we watching intently for what God is growing? One of my commentators this week said that each of us brings something to God's table besides an appetite – seeds of faith are waiting for a harvest.

A small story – once in the midst of a move to a new parish, I had to leave my dog with a friend. With all the chaos and phones connecting and disconnecting, my friend David had a hard time reaching me to tell me that the dog was ill. For some mysterious reason the information phone people routed him to a monastery in Georgia. He called and asked for Linda. The monk insisted several times that I could not be there. David said, “no, she could be there. She's having a really bad week.” Why was the call routed there? To get a cranky monk out of bed? Was it only an amusing story or more revelatory? Did the monks pray for “lost Linda?” Does it still ask me to imagine an unseen connection grounded in common mystery?

It seems that we are in an important time of change in the church in our engagement with God's world and with a critical way of hearing scripture. We are given an enormous privilege to partner with God in the mystery of mission and ministry. Neighbors are revealed, new fields opened, the harvest invites our participation. For God, small seems to be big. Ah, mystery. Amen+

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