

3 Pentecost B

Ezekiel 17:22-24

Psalms 92:1-4, 12-15

Mark 4:26-34

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Grace and peace to you from Jesus Christ. Amen.

God is a good gardener, planting, tending, harvesting – alongside of us in every sunny or cloudy day.

Sometimes when things are too large for us to understand we tell stories to shape our imaginations around what is beyond comprehending. This is very common in the Bible, and we heard Jesus today, teaching with the use of parables, we catch glimpses into the nature of God and ourselves as God's family. The mustard seed parable is classic.

Long, long ago I had a small pin that was round and white, with gold around the edge and in the centre of it, it held an actual mustard seed. I don't remember where I got it, but I remember thinking, "when someone asks me about it, I can share about the kingdom of God." No one ever asked me. Probably because they didn't even know what it was and I was too shy to get a conversation started. But Jesus uses this image to teach us about God's kingdom.

Seeds, as you know, are small but full of potential. Amazing potential! Just think for a moment of that tiny little thing containing the map of life in a compressed form! A seed becomes, growing into its full potential with time, care and attention. Seeds of course, come in infinite shapes and sizes – did you ever stop to think of how each one knows what it is to grow into -it's incredible!

To state the obvious, seeds are planted, which really is an act of hope and trust. Planting is looking to the future, not knowing what will come or exactly what will be needed. True, there are some seeds that we eat, but we always reserve enough to plant, enough to ensure a new crop to come. As you drive the countryside you can see some farms are "seed farms," farms where the wheat is not dried, sifted and ground into flour, but it is saved for a new season.

No wonder Jesus used seeds as one way for us to think about our life with God.

As we hear God's care for us, in us are planted seeds of love, compassion, forgiveness, sharing, justice, service, stewardship, care, healing and much more. These tiny seeds given in word and song, in baptism and communion, given in friendships over coffee, praying together, remembering the saints, they are given to nourish and sustain us. We are strengthened and built up by this good work – the harvest is rich and plentiful. It's like every time we gather to worship (even online) every time we pray, or hear the Word of God, every time we take in the bread and wine of Jesus – it's like a few more seeds are added to our storehouse. Then, when times are lean we have something to fall back on, we've got some reserve in our tank to carry us through.

And so here we are. We are in what we might call a lean or tough time. We're in a time with multiple intersecting challenges as truth is exposed of our history around the treatment of Canada's first peoples. We're in a time where we are challenged to live up to being a nation that welcomes all, including our Muslim friends. We are in a time when we are just beginning to touch and admit the grief we've held inside for 16 months during this pandemic.

Racism, oppression and a pandemic have seeds too. Planting within us attitudes and thoughts of hatred, division, privilege, and scarcity, these seeds are really like weeds among the wheat sapping energy and nutrients from us and our communities. As God's people however, we have learned to tell good seed from bad.

This is why we cannot and will not ignore the work of rooting up what threatens to counter the work of love. We rely on the teaching and nourishment we've been given so that we have the strength to raise our voice to equity, to speak the truth about racism, to have the patience and desire to listen to the cry of First Nations people. The good seeds that God plants are for all, not just for Lutherans, for settlers, or even just for Christians – because God is the Creator of all.

Jesus used many other ideas to help people understand God's desired kin-dom, like a hidden treasure or a pearl. Imagine for a moment, how you would complete the sentence: the kingdom of God is like...

It's important for us to dream, imagine and talk about this, important to remind one another of the good news and hopefulness we've learned from the scriptures. As a people of God we gather to learn, delve into and challenge one another to live into these images. As a family of faith it is part of our work together as community – to stay the course especially when times get tough, to allow the good seeds of God's history and faith to nourish us into new expressions of humanity.

I'm grateful for the work of this congregation in welcoming. Who would have thought so long ago when our first Welcome Statement was written (2008) the seeds that were planted that have enabled us to continue in this journey. We didn't know then what we would be witnesses of today. And I'm proud that we didn't stop there – at only making a statement – but that we have intentionally worked to *live* that welcome. We may not always see the difference being made on a Sunday morning when we gather, but I assure you, truly, lives have been changed by it. Seekers have wept at its words. Newcomers have doubted it when we've said "all are welcome" until they've seen it in action here. Long term members have upheld, proclaimed, and taught it. People who have been disowned by their families, kicked out of their churches, who are new to Canada and need support and encouragement have found a place of belonging and acceptance here. We are making a difference; we are planting new seeds in our city. We are building up a storehouse for our children and whatever the future will bring to them.

Be blessed Holy Spirit. Listen to the Word, be moved by the Spirit – go and be seeds of love in a world much in need. Amen.