

In the name of God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

During the school year, one of my favorite parts of my job here at St. John's is leading the storytelling at the St. John's Day School Chapel. In that chapel there are three groups according to the developmental stage of the children. The three year olds and the four and five year olds are told a story from the Bible. The children love it when the stories are acted out, or when they get to act them out. And they love it when I bring visuals for them. They love to touch and smell and see. You can just see in their faces, and in their eyes, that their imaginations are working overtime.

The story from today's gospel contains two of my favorite stories to tell in chapel, the parable of the Sower and the parable of the Mustard Seed. With the parable of the sower the children can see the story acted out; the sower wildly and extravagantly throwing handfuls of seed out from a seemingly endless stock in her farming style apron with large roomy pockets.. With the parable of the mustard seed the children see visuals; sometimes I even remember to bring an actual mustard seed to chapel. But usually, I print out pictures of the mustard seed perched on someone's finger tip. It literally looks like it could be a gnat or a deer tick but it is a real seed. Their eyes grow wide with wonder when they see the picture of what that seed can become. The mustard shrub or the mustard tree are millions of times bigger than the seed it started from. How can that be, they wonder. Indeed, how *can* that be?

I wonder if you've ever considered what actually goes on in that transformative process. Can you even wrap your brain around just how much genetic information is packed into that teeny little seed? That kind of informational packaging makes a zip file seem big and clunky! Think of all the precise programming and powerful energy that is

contained within that tiny form; that form that virtually vanishes when all of the contents it contains begins to emerge.

Now think of this. Jesus compares this teeny mustard seed to the kingdom of God. What is he saying? Is he suggesting that everything that is necessary to bring forth God's kingdom can be contained in a seed; a seed that is freely and extravagantly sown all over God's creation?

You know that Jesus revealed God's truth to his followers in parables. He used parables because the images in them were so familiar to his listeners. The images he used gave them a way to grasp new concepts about God; concepts that revealed God not as rigid and demanding, but as gracious, generous and forgiving. Parables enabled the disciples and followers of Jesus to imagine God as a character in the parables; God as one who might involve himself in their daily life not as one who expected or maybe even *demand*ed subservience and sacrifice.

Jesus' followers listened to these stories and then they talked about these stories among themselves; each one adding their own ideas and interpretations until they made sense. They tossed them around until they perceived in themselves a new connection to God. The absolute genius of using parables is that we can still use them that way today. Even after our scientific and industrial and informational revolutions, we can still gain insights from these parables that can allow us to perceive God differently; allow us to perceive a new and deeper relationship with God.

For today, let us focus on the seed. Not the sower or the act of sowing, but the seed. If the sower is God, and I think that was Jesus' intent, then what does that seed represent? Well, if we know that Jesus was saying that the kingdom of God is like the

mustard seed how exactly is it like the seed? Is it like the seed because it is capable of holding amazing amounts of creative material and energy? Is it like the seed because it can produce its end product only if it is properly nurtured and tended? Maybe that's precisely what Jesus had in mind. God generously distributes that all the material, seen and unseen, that is needed to allow humanity to bring forth God's kingdom among us. The act of sowing is God's dispensing of his grace. The seed God is sowing is the logos, the creative, compassionate, justice loving life that we see revealed in Jesus; in Jesus, the Christ.

Let's think now about where those seeds might land, who or what might receive them. God's grace, the act of sowing those seeds, happens everywhere. There is nowhere and no one that is exempt from the possibility of being the recipient of that grace. All that we human beings need to do in response is to receive it. But that's not the end of the process, it is instead the beginning of the next stage in the life of that seed. Like any seed, it contains the power filled potential of becoming something much greater than itself. In this case, that sacred seed has the potential of unfolding into the reality of God's kingdom; has the potential of transforming the world and the circumstances of the recipient of that seed. But the seed cannot and will not grow into all that it is intended to be unless, and this is the important part of this message, unless it is nurtured.

God knows, and we know it too if we stop and consider it, that God created humanity to be the recipients of the seeds of the kingdom. But knowing that, *believing* that with all our heart, soul and strength is hard. The false gods of the world are so terribly distracting - the false gods of money, power and fame, to name a few. God

wants us, each of us as individuals and as communities of faith, to trust that this promise to us is true. And to that end God wants us to walk in faith, not by sight because sight is what gets us into trouble. We can be so easily drawn off course by the thrill and excitement that the world provides. The journey of faith, the Way of Christ, is the way of living a full life but it is a life that requires sacrifice - sacrifice of time, talent and treasure for the good of our fellow man. That doesn't mean that we can't have fun, Jesus loved a good party and a great meal. But we know from the story of Jesus that our ultimate pleasure and treasure is our relationship with God.

The question I have is, are we the type of soil that God wants to nurture the seeds of that kind of faith? Are we, together as the church, the properly prepared, amended and tended soil that can receive such a sacred seed? Or do we have some work to do?

It seems to me that we are on the right track to being fertile ground for God's kingdom to grow. We at St. John's have faithful worship, we have formation for all ages and stages of life, we have people who provide outreach to organizations and individuals in our community. We have fellowship opportunities throughout the year. But do we all participate whenever we can to the best extent that is possible? I'm not sure. I know there are times when there is something else that I might want to be doing. I, for one, have discovered that I cannot be in two places at once. But am I giving to God all that I can of myself? Are we as a community of faith? Some of us likely are.

But for those of you who think you could benefit from a little more God time, it is helpful to set a goal. We are used to praying at the beginning and end of the day or at the beginning of a meal. But what if we prayed in the middle? Stop whatever we're

doing and pray. Pray in the midst of acting; in the midst of eating, in the midst of working, in the midst of carpooling, in the midst of working out. Might that bring us closer to growing that seed of faith to maturity? How about making time for mission, local or otherwise? How about getting absorbed in a book study that might broaden our understanding, open our eyes to the possibility of a deeper faith? There are many options to choose from but the end to which they will lead is not clear. We follow in faith because we know deep down that the body of the faithful, the church, is our much needed, our longed for foundation.

Martin Luther King, Jr. famously said, "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." I get that. I've experienced that. Join me on this journey that leads to a future that is unclear, but we have faith, especially if we go together, that the way will lead to God's kingdom. To God be the glory.