

## Lectionary 11, Proper 6 B 18

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June 17, 2018

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.  
Amen.

Jesus said; 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?' So what parable in your life would you use to begin to explain the kingdom of God to someone? To which you may answer, 'we do not use parables anymore.' But I would argue that we do it all the time. But maybe an easier question would be is; how do you explain to someone something by which they have nothing to compare? Because this was the problem which Jesus faced as he began to sow the seeds of faith and belief in people who are looking for concrete answers, who were looking for the Messiah and had come with specific ideas as to how the Messiah would act and the things he would do to reestablish David's kingdom on earth.

First of all one thing we need to understand is the kingdom of God which Jesus is talking about is not about geography or some static place; it is about the dynamic reality of God's presence and power within the creation and within the lives of God's people.

Secondly, I will that I will not be explaining the finer details of the parable of the sower or of the mustard seed. For two reasons, the first is to try to do so will lessen the power of the parable to act in our lives. As much as we desire to have certainty and firm answers to the mysteries in life, parables work to open up the possibilities and often provide more questions than answers.

Because if parables were able to be explained and offer exact answers then there would be no need for parables. One does not need a parable to answer simple math equations. Likewise you do not want a parable to explain to you how to get from here to Chicago. Parables work better when there is not a clear explanation or when you are trying to inform someone about something to which they have nothing to compare.

June 17, 2018

More than once I have been in conversation about baptism and infants when the mothers in the room transition to talking about childbirth. I often just say it is all a miracle to me and leave the conversation. There is nothing I can add or take from the conversation. Just as if I asked any of the mothers here to explain what it was like to be pregnant or to give birth. You might come up with a parable of your own in trying to explain. In the end those of us who have not experience that miracle may at best be able to get a glimpse or be able to walk alongside someone, but we will never truly understand. To that matter, having listened to many women talk of their experiences in childbirth, each birth is unique and different so how anyone might truly understand someone else's experience is also difficult, but that is the miracle of birth in my view.

Now that I have your mind going off in one direction, hear again the parables which Jesus spoke. *'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'*

*Jesus also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'*

In these parables Jesus is working to explain what the kingdom of God is like.

When I read and hear parables I try to take note of the words or the phrases which stand out. In the first parable after the person scattered the seed it

June 17, 2018

said; 'he (that is the sower) would sleep and rise night and day, the seed would sprout and grow and he does not know how.' The sower did nothing after sowing the seed except to go about his daily routine. As he did, the seed did its thing of sprouting and growing and producing a harvest. The sower does not know how this all happens, yet he goes about the harvest when the grain is ripe. The Spirit of God, the work of God continues even without our help. A miracle takes place and the seed sprouts and grows as it does.

Many years ago about this time of year as I walked into worship at my home congregation in Illinois I had a conversation with a retired farmer, or at least as retired as some farmers get. We were talking about how planting season was going and the prospects for the coming harvest. I cannot remember the exact words he used, but it went something like this.

He said, 'you know farmers are among some of the most faithful and hopeful people. We spend our time and our efforts to till the ground and to plant the seed. Then except for a little tending to the plants we wait and watch. For it is God who give rain which waters the soil; who sends the sun to warm and give light to the earth. Then somehow all the right elements are in place that causes the seed to sprout and grow and mature. I know the science which tells me how it happens, but what is the spark that starts it growing, that puts all of that into motion.' He finished with words of thanksgiving for the miracle that God does every day and every season.

Jesus also lived in a rural, agricultural community, so it was no wonder he used parables which used seeds and planting and harvest to offer a glimpse of what the kingdom of God is like. Which is the point Jesus why used parables. They are not to give full and detailed explanation of about the kingdom, but to challenge and open possibilities about how the kingdom of God is at work

June 17, 2018

even if that work is unseen or undetected until long after it begins to sprout and grow.

The parable of the mustard seed does take some explanation for us because of the different way we hear the parable. This is not the mustard plant we cultivate and grow for spices. In Jesus' day it was a weed, an intrusive plant which did give shade and have a purpose. But no one would plant it because it would continue to spread and grow and take over. It may not seem so at first, but soon the mustard plants would overtake neighboring fields. Think of the creeping Charlie or the dandelions in our day. They have a purpose of providing ground cover or maybe some beauty as the flowers bloom and give color to the fields. Yet no one plants them on purpose.

While we may not want to see the kingdom of God as a weed, the kingdom has that effect on the world around it. It is here, in the community of faith, as part of the body of Christ where the seeds of faith are sown. Then as we go about our days, sleeping and rising night and day the seeds continue sprout and grow even if we do not know how.

The seeds of faith will continue grow and sprout, they will continue to push and expand until it invades all aspects of life. Faith changes the way we look at the world, the way we live and move and have our being. Here the words Paul writes to the Corinthians hold true as well. In faith, in living out of the kingdom of God in this world, as we see and experience each other in ways of the world, we no longer regard them from the worldly or human point of view. Because we are living a kingdom life, a life made new by our faith in Jesus Christ. It is in living out of the kingdom of God 'we walk by faith and not by sight.' In our walking by faith, even when we are unsure of what it all means to or for us, our faith and the kingdom continues to grow in our lives and our world.        AMEN        T.G.B.T.G.

**Mark 4:26-34**

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He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

**2 Corinthians 5:6-17**

So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

~~Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.~~

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!