

PROPER SIX, PENTECOST 4, JUNE 16, 2024

We all probably remember one thing that our dads said to us or taught us. My dad, since he had four girls, was determined to teach all of us how to use tools. Since he was continually remodeling our house he relied on us to help with those renovations. I can remember being given specific tasks to do so that when he came home from work he could proceed further with his renovations. Now my dad died when I was 13 so I don't have a lot of memories of things he said but what he taught me definitely took root.

But whatever your dad might have said or taught you it was like a seed inside of you that germinated and took root and made you who you are today. Sometimes it is the simplest thing that doesn't even register until years later and we realize what an impact it had on us. The same thing happens to us all the time.

Have you ever had someone thank you for something you've completely forgotten? You know the kind of experience I mean. A friend of yours, or even more likely, an acquaintance, tells you about a chance remark of yours that made a real difference to him or her.

Perhaps it was when someone was going through a rough patch and you said something you've long since forgotten. But they haven't. It turns out the long-forgotten, chance remark you made gave just the right word of comfort or support and they have treasured it for years and they finally found the moment to tell you so.

If this kind of thing has happened to you, you also know that it is a very moving experience, one that both humbles you and makes you feel grateful and wonderful. Something so small that you said became something so big for that person.

"It's like a grain of mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, so that the birds of the air can come and make nests in its branches. It is like a man who took and sowed seed in his field, and the earth produced of itself first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.

These two little parables which the Gospel offers us this morning are slightly different, but they both make their point with the image of seed. One emphasizes the contrast between the insignificant act of sowing seed and the significance of the resulting process of growth. The other emphasizes the contrast between a gigantic shrub and the tiny seed that produced it. Both of them are teaching that in God's kingdom more comes out than we thought we put in. More happens than we thought possible.

The real seed of God's kingdom is always being sown in the here and now. It's just like the mustard seed where the tiniest words, the most inefficient pieces of witness, the little actions of every day can make a significant difference. You could almost say that whatever you do sows a seed for God or against God. The choices you make have consequences as when you decide to greet a stranger, or ask a friend "May I pray with you?" The actions you take as to whether you speak up against racist or sexist jokes or if you volunteer at a food pantry or kitchen and engage the clients in conversation all have ramifications. All these things sow a seed, both in your life and in other lives.

Let me mix the metaphors a bit and move away from talking about seeds. I have heard that belief is hearing the music of the future while faith is dancing to it. I am convinced that God wants us dancing to the music of God's intended future, living into

the time that is not yet but sure to come. Think of it this way. You know how in the opening of the Gospel of John he writes in the beginning was the Word. The Greek word Logos we translate as Word is very abstract and clinical whereas in Aramaic the word is dabhar and roughly translated means "an irresistible creative energy exploding into prodigious creativity." That's a lot contained in one tiny word but it describes Jesus and his ministry. He is the creative energy and his ministry done by all our ancestors and us has the power to explode into prodigious creativity. We are the product of what our ancestors said and did. We are dancing to the faith they planted in us while we are to plant belief for future generations.

In other words, we gather in the shade of trees planted by people who never saw them grow to its maturity. We enjoy freedoms gained by martyrs who never experienced them. We are comforted by a faith that was hoped for but not known for centuries. And, like those who nurtured the seedlings of their day we are called to nurture the tiny, unimpressive, and vulnerable possibilities that we know are the will and hope of our God.

In the midst of a worldly culture that idolizes bigness, for the Christian there is a norm that honors smallness – the kind of smallness with which Jesus worked. We can see that no matter what size a congregation may be, its success as a part of the Body of Christ depends on its ability to maintain standards illustrated by Jesus. This means maintaining concern for individuals, promoting the feeling of worth in everyone, welcoming the stranger, making sure that all are interconnected, so that, for example, there is somebody to miss you when you are absent. Small-town people and those who live in tight neighborhoods understand the value of natural and easy connectedness of fellowship in the Christian sense. We all would do well to work hard to make this kind of small community connectedness a reality in the midst of a mass culture. Congregations small or large, can learn to live into the power of such a dynamic.

The small size of community does not devalue its potential. From the right kind of "small thinking" can flow the values and mission that Jesus gave to his first followers who have passed it on to us. This parable reminds us that it is not the size that is important but what comes from it. It is not the size of the seed that is important, but what counts – in God's eyes – is the quality of God's love that we can spread among each other and into the wider community.

What we do and say to others has a resounding impact. The smallest of words or actions can change a life. We need to ask ourselves if what we say and do is really Christ like. Does our core faith beliefs align wholeheartedly with Christ's teachings. Frankly, if more Christians really adhered to what Jesus taught us this world would be in far better shape than it is. Jesus taught us to treat everyone, that is everyone of all religions, ethnicities, sexual orientation, etc with the same respect and love that God gives and requires of us to do. We cannot spread God's love if we don't embrace those core beliefs that future generations can dance too.

The famous eighteenth-century French philosopher and cynic, Voltaire, was no friend to religion. Yet in one of his most famous sayings he captured the meaning of God's kingdom in the lives of Christians of any age. He wisely wrote, "How infinitesimal is the importance of anything I can do. But how infinitely important it is that I should do it."

That is the lesson of the mustard seed. Our lives are more than the sum of days lived and dollars earned. Life has meaning beyond the walls of our homes or community and it goes beyond the walls of self-interest and ego. We have to live in relationship to one another and to the world around us. So, on this Father's day, as you remember what your dad said or did to inspire you remember how that seed which was planted in you has grown and ask yourselves what seeds are you planting for the future. Are you planting the seeds that emphasizes God's love that brings worth and value not just in our lives but in those we encounter? Because in the end that is what we are called to do and be. Amen