

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

Rev. Jason Glombicki

June 17, 2018

As humans, we love a good story. When we meet someone new we might say, “tell me your story.” We like to discuss the storyline of that new show. We bathe our children in stories about our family, our nation, and our religion. Even Jesus told a variety of stories.

Case in point: today, Jesus tells two short parables. In the first parable, someone scattered seed on the ground. Mysteriously, the seed grew and grew. Then, the person who scattered the seed harvested the grain. Ok. So, as far as a story goes, this one is soooo boring. There is nothing surprising. It’s basically a quick botany lesson on an everyday experience. So, what do we do with it? Well, we could painstakingly try to make it into an analogy. We could ponder the seed thrower and wonder if the person is God, Jesus, the church, or us. Or we could focus on how the seed grows on its own, reminding us that sometimes we need to get out of the way and let God’s work be done. Which, is a good warning for church leaders. We could look at this and that and spend all day trying to come up with the “correct” interpretation of this simple story. Or, we could acknowledge that there are multiple ways to view this parable and that these interpretations open us to God’s presence and work in and through the commonplace.

Let's not dwell on that first parable too long, because we have a second parable trying to explain God's presence on earth. Here we find a teeny-tiny seed that bursts into a shrub. In fact, it's a shrub that annually dies and comes back to life. So, what do we do with *this* parable? Well, sometimes people talk about how a small seed grows into a mighty tree. But, mustard seeds don't actually grow into trees. Especially not trees that birds can nest in and find shade. Instead, Jesus tells us a parable that makes us raise an eyebrow. Perhaps Jesus was connecting the mustard plant to today's reading from the prophet Ezekiel. In that reading we discovered a vision of a noble cedar tree, with shade for rest on a hot, sunny day, a place where all types of birds could gather and partake of its fruits, a tree that reminds people of God's presence. So, perhaps Jesus was talking about the mustard shrub in a paradoxical light. Could it be that Jesus was taking an everyday shrub and reimagining it as a mighty life-giving tree? After all, the idea of a noble tree is an image we ponder on Good Friday when we discover that a wooden execution cross became a symbol of life. You see, in our Christian life we find endless paradoxes, we see death become life, we see God's presence in the ones whom we serve, and we return God's love when we give to the needy.

Regardless of where God's spirit takes us with these parables, they are ecological images of faith. For me, both images express God's care and expansive welcome through ordinary, everyday items. So too, in our church we've been working to allow the ordinary, everyday things to bring life and expansive welcome. We know that there are some who cannot be here today with the oppressive heat and humidity. It's more than discomfort, it's an actual health concern. With that in mind, we've committed to installing air conditioning to expand our welcome. Yet, with this commonplace installation we want to care for all of creation. So, over the past two years, we've explored environmentally-responsible ways to make this ordinary thing give life to all. At the conclusion of the Seal and Sustain campaign today, we hope to install a cooling breeze and also

offset our increased energy consumption with environmentally-friendly solar panels. Sure, air conditioning is a dime a dozen now a day, but through this ordinary thing with our solar panels we are making a theological statements about our call to care for God's creation, our responsibility to the most vulnerable impacted by climate change, and the importance of being a glimpse of God's expansive welcome in this place.

You see, time and again we see God working through ordinary things like using our voices to speak on behalf of immigrant families, or sharing our time with the most vulnerable, or donating money to support those in need. In each of these actions, we find our God's kingdom visible on this earth.

Friends, there it is: our God tells parables so that we can explore our faith. These simple stories open our eyes to things unseen. Through them, we see how ordinary everyday things, like seeds and mustard shrubs, can embody God's presence and teach of God's love. So too, as we gather here during worship, we are reminded of God's presence in the simple things – in the waters of the font, in bread and wine at this table, in you and in me. Today, let us celebrate God's presence in the ordinary and everyday things. Amen.