Third Sunday after Pentecost All Saints’ Church

June 13, 2021 Proper 6 Year B

Ezekiel 17:22-24 2 Corinthians 5:6-17

Psalm 92:1-4, 11-14 Mark 4:26-34

For many years the *New York Herald Tribune* ran the same cartoon every year on February 12th. Two men show up in a snowy wilderness. One is on a horse, just coming from town and the other man greets him on the road, asking him about the news. The man on the horse says that the preacher in town is leaving for Washington to see Madison sworn in, and Napoleon had captured most of Spain. The man on the horse then asks,

“What’s new out here, neighbor?”

“Nuthin’ a tall, nuthin’ a tall, ‘cept for a new baby down t’ Tom Lincoln’s. Nuthin’ ever happens out here.” (as told in *Homily Service*, Volume 33, June 2000).

The smallest of seeds is planted.

I was at RiverMead this week holding our monthly Eucharist service and had a nice time catching up with residents there, and I heard the exciting news of residents meeting the new CEO, Lara Shea. Bill James after eight years has retired, and Lara has moved over from Scott Farrar to take on the helm.

One of the residents said that what she loved most about Lara’s story was that as a high school student, she realized that she was interested in long term care facilities. She called up RiverMead which was just finishing construction to see if she could get a job. They said that the only opening was as dishwasher. Lara said, “Fine, I’ll take it.” From dishwasher to CEO.

The smallest of seeds is planted.

The Kingdom of God is as if there was a pandemic. Congregations across the world switched to online services, calling parishioners through tree phones and good ol’ fashioned letter writing, and rallying around those in need- helping neighbor and stranger alike with bills, food, and housing. They remained church in small and big ways, and they did not know how.

The smallest of seeds is planted.

Thank goodness for today’s gospel reading. I think simply put, Jesus is saying that in all the ways we scatter the seeds of our living, whatever they may be, the power of God’s spirit is within it all, and we, not knowing how our growing happens, need to trust in the presence of God’s transforming love guiding it all.

In other words, trust in your heart and the good-God heart of others & keep on walking.

Jesus goes on to ask, “With what can we compare the Kingdom of God or what parable will we use for it, for “this growing”? And then he takes a mustard seed, which Jesus says we can barely see. Well, that’s not quite true. Not only is a mustard seed not that small, it’s also a scrubby plant and invasive. It’s not grand like the Cedars of Lebanon. Basically, it’s a weed.

But, I think that’s the point. This unexpected gift in a wildflower, gone rouge, ugly to boot becomes a place that gives solace and sanctuary, that gives birds enough space to rest, to nest and to make a home. From something so insignificant, becomes something so great. Jesus is reminding us that we don’t understand, and never will, but God has it all in God’s hands. Our sins can be stronger than we are, yet God is calling us to be tenders.

We can tend to the world if we trust in this tiny seed. Jesus, in the hidden mystery of who he is as both the Christ and a human son, is inviting us to our own hidden mystery- our own capacity as sons and daughters. And who we are, as Paul reminds us, as the Christ. Because “in Christ, (in this seed) we become a new creation, where the old has passed away, and everything has become new!” We, too, can become a place of solace and sanctuary to others.

We can do and be all of this, but not by relying on our strengths, our self-reliance, our talents, our connections, our assets… not to say that those things are bad, they just are limited, if they are not grounded in prayer, in faith, in community, in waiting, in listening. In the continual awakening of God within, we pray for God in our heartbeat, in our breathing, in our thoughts and emotions, in our hearing, seeing, touching, and tasting. It is by being awake to this God in us that we can see God in the world around us.

The more I think about our life of faith, the more I realize that it is not about finding God, but rather about letting ourselves be found by God. It’s not how we are to know God, but rather how we are to let ourselves be known by God. It’s not how we are to love God, but rather how we are to let ourselves be loved by God. I think this letting God in helps us to walk by faith, not by sight.

In my career as a teacher, I had the good fortune to become the chaplain to several Muslim convenings throughout the United States. Muslim scholars, clerics, and leaders gathered every two months to gain support for each other and I was there as a Christian presence of prayer and solidarity. Indeed, I was a small seed within the small seed of our convenings.

We were gathering in San Francisco, at the same time the Dalai Lama was speaking in town. One of the members of our convening thought it would be a good idea to invite the Dalai Lama to our think tank. A last-minute invitation. No one thought he would come, but he did!

I will never forget waiting for him in the lobby of the hotel, as he stepped out of the car with his translator and walked toward us. Word had gotten out that he was meeting with us, so there were journalists, but what I most remember were Buddhists coming to him for his blessing, and how he walked and touched and smiled his way to our meeting room, stopping at each one, eye to eye. As if he had all the time in the world.

He sat patiently as he listened to all of the questions from these Muslims leaders, those he was honoring by his presence. During all the seriousness, he laughed- this big belly chuckle which started somewhere deep within him, rising up, shaking his whole body.

As he spoke about suffering and loving his enemies… he was radiating joy and peace about the beauty of life, the light of Grace, all the while he talked about persecution. Here’s a man, in exile, with no army, no money, dressed in a simple robe, holding the whole room (if not the world) in his hands. How can any of us know how this works.

His answer to all the questions: Prayer and humility. Foremost in his private meditation, he allowed the suffering of his people ***and their oppressors*** into his heart, because oppressors suffer too and struggle to find happiness and deserve our compassion.

The only place evil is going to be transformed is in our hearts by loving all. And that his specific pain needed to become a part of The Pain, which is everywhere.

I don’t know about you, but I am really bad about praying for my enemies. That by loving our enemies (and by the way that also includes loving the things you hate about yourself), this becomes the raw material for compassion.

Jesus sees us as tiny seeds with the capacity to give rest and solace to all, not just our neighbors or those we love, but also for our enemies.

We trust that God is transforming the world even in all its messiness, cruelty and fear into Something New. And that somehow, without know how, seeds that we are, are becoming a part of this transforming love…. This Something New!

And not to forget to laugh, a deep and large belly laugh. AMEN