

Sermon for June 13, 2021

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We currently have a debate happening in our house. Smack in the middle of our backyard there stands a rather large new growth. The debate - is it a weed or a tree? Either way it appeared out of nowhere and has grown at an exponential rate. Now around 20 feet high, arguably with leaves and apparent bark, the weed contenders are losing ground. It has sprouted before our eyes, without any calculated efforts on our part, its growth surprising us each new day.

In contrast, we have been working on intentionally buying and planting a tree since our now 14 year old son was born. When our first child came along, we bought and planted a tree the day of her baptism. With the second child, we got around to purchasing a tree by the time he was five, watched it die when we didn't manage to get it in the ground, and have just recently decided to try again. The tree is still in the pot on our deck but I am holding onto hope. The towering tree/weed that appeared out of nowhere seems to be standing mocking our potted purchase.

Maybe this is why I was so struck by today's Gospel reading. Jesus said "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."

While we sleep and rise, night and day, the kingdom of God is at work and appears before our eyes, though we don't know how. We are surprised by what sprouts up before us.

Jesus goes on, the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, "when sown upon the ground, it 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." Again – surprise! When you plant the tiny mustard seed you would never expect such a large shrub to develop from such a small beginning. The kingdom of God springs forth from unexpected sources with unanticipated results.

The kingdom of God surprises us. Sometimes I think we get lost in trying to control the coming of the kingdom. We as Christians, while we know we are not the Creator, feel a sense of obligation to make this work of God grow, feel responsible for doing something to bring about God's good. But could it be we are so busy doing our own planning, purchasing and planting, that we are missing the kingdom spouting up smack where we least expect it without our even knowing how?

There is a franticness about the nation right now. There has been for years. Church attendance is shrinking, church buildings are closing, there is a shortage of pastors. New programs are being written, new supplies purchased, new ministries planted. We have to do something to get things growing right? We have to figure out how to make this happen. We judge potential success by current size. But listen again to today's text "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.” And the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed – tiny, but becomes the greatest of all.

The kingdom of God is ready to surprise us. To sprout while we sleep without our understanding - To grow from tiny beginnings. Are we willing to be surprised?

Our Psalm today says “it is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praise to your name, O Most High; to herald your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night.”

There is that night and day language from the gospel again. We are to sleep and rise giving thanks to the Lord, heralding God’s love in the morning and God’s faithfulness at night. We sleep and rise to discover the kingdom of God before us. We are to live in this pattern of awaking in God’s love and sleeping with trust in God’s faithfulness. It is in this rhythm, not a rhythm of franticness depending on our own abilities, that we have our eyes opened to the ways that the kingdom of God is growing amidst us, in small ways, in surprising ways we do not control or understand.

In one of my seminary books there was a poem by Arthur Green and Barry Holtz that has stayed with me. It read “All your words each day are related to one another. All of them are rooted in the first words that you speak.” It was an urging to begin each day with a word of thanksgiving and prayer to God. The idea being if you begin each day with words with God it will shape your words throughout the day.

This is the rhythm our scriptures urge us to today. Begin your day in a word of thanksgiving for God’s love in the morning – this will shape your ability to see the kingdom of God sprouting up throughout your day. Go to bed in thanksgiving for God’s faithfulness and you will awake with eyes to see the kingdom of God growing from unexpected beginnings.

We are to be rooted in God’s presence, in the rhythm of a life in God, so that we may take note of where the kingdom is taking root and respond to these kingdom sprouts with delight and thanksgiving.

In our Old Testament reading we hear the word of the Lord telling about what he is about to plant. The Messiah will spring forth and all creation shall dwell within Christ’s care. The reading ends “I the Lord have spoken, I will accomplish it.”

Let us enter a rhythm of thanksgiving in our sleeping and our waking and expect to be surprised at the kingdom growing up around us. With new eyes, let us look around and wonder: are their small things being planted as the start of something big God is doing? Are there new growths growing up in unexpected places at exponential speeds that urge us to recognize the presence of the kingdom of God?

Who would have expected that God would plant a kingdom through a small child born in a manger? Everyone was surprised when the new growth came from the most unexpected place, a tomb.

For The Lord has spoken and the Lord will accomplish it.