

Proper 6 B 2018

Mark 4: 26-34

In the time of Jesus,
Somewhere near where he lived,
Someone –
Woman, man, boy child, girl child,
Someone ate a handful of dates,
And threw the pits into the corner.

Just a few years ago,
Those pits were unearthed –
Six of them.

Two scientists,
Two women dedicated to the discovery and cultivation
Of the gifts of the plant kingdom,
Took the treasure they were given
By archaeologists,
three of the precious seeds,
And planted them
In a very special growing medium,
And then –
No, they didn't watch them carefully –
They went about their business,
Tending to their other tasks,
Sleeping and waking,
Night and day.

And then, one day,
One of them remembered
The ancient seeds,
And went to look.

And look –
There was a bump in the earth.

And then,
Later,
Two spindly,
Pale,
Forlorn looking leaves.

And then,
Look –

Another leaf that was vibrant green,
And then seven more –
And now, years later,
A tree that stands ten feet tall,
That sends its pollen out into a new and different world,
Bringing life and fruit to trees
That did not exist when it fell to the ground
As a seed,
And lay, covered in dust,
For two thousand years.

The kingdom of God is like this.
Someone takes a seed,
And plants it,
And goes away,
And the earth produces of itself.
A simple miracle.
Routine for some.
Unexpected for others.

Whether you are a green thumb
Or a black thumb,
You know, I expect,
What it is like to plant a seed.

But I also expect,
And if I'm wrong
Raise your hand now,
I expect no one here,
Has taken in hand
A seed from the time of Jesus
And planted it –
In the ground,
In a special growing medium,
Anywhere.

The kingdom of God is like this.
You plant a seed,
And it grows.

And the kingdom of God is like this.
You plant an amazing seed,
Tiny like a mustard seed,
Ancient like the date pit from Masada
And it rests in the earth,
Opens up,

Sends out a shoot,
And begins again.

Without this miracle,
There would be no life for us.

Without our care,
Whether tender or careless,
Without our care,
Would there be a miracle?
Yes, and no.

Without our care,
The earth would still produce of itself,
First the grain and then the ear,
Then the full grain would appear,
Rich and various,
Multi-colored and many faceted.

Without our care, though,
No ancient seed
From the time of Jesus
Would sprout, and grow,
And send its pollen into a new world.

The kingdom of God
Is like this.
It happens without us,
No matter what;
it happens no matter what we do
To help or hinder it.

And the kingdom of God is like this.
it only happens the way it does
Because of what we do.

The kingdom is happening here and now
Because we are actively seeking ways
To make it happen.
And the kingdom of God
Happens here and now
No matter what we do
To foster or prevent it .

In this place,
We have been actively seeking the kingdom of God

By pursuing a particular project,
By looking for a way to offer sanctuary in the city
For those who are unsheltered.
Sleeping and waking, night and day,
We have worked to bring this vision
To fruition.

And while we were working,
The kingdom of God
was lodged also,
struggling and unseen,
in other seeds,
pressing up the earth,
ready to sprout.

The kingdom of God
Is bringing forth new growth,
New leaves,
In the longing for connection and community.

Think of the fun at the auction.
At the baseball game.
Think of the fun you might have
Joining the vestry at one of many chances this summer
Simply to do something together,
with no agenda other than connecting
with your community.

In a time when community is questionable,
When many of the ways
In which we used to simply be together
Are beginning to fade –
Did you know that attendance
At major league baseball games
And symphony orchestra concerts
Is declining as rapidly as attendance at church services? –
At a time when community is stretching thin,
The kingdom of God
Looks like people choosing to be together,
In all our misfit quiriness,
With all our broken hopes
And fading dreams,
With all our surprising pinnacles
And haphazard delights.

The kingdom of God

Looks like a parable
As newly ancient
As the time when Jesus first told it,
Around the time
Six date pits landed in the corner
Of a back room
In a mountaintop fortress.

The kingdom of God
Is like a parable happening here.

Whether you love the permanent supportive housing project
Or hate it –
Whether you long for connection
With those around you
Or come here to touch the transcendent,
Whatever brings you here,
For the first time –
Or for as many times
As the years the date pit lay in the dust,
The kingdom of God
Is planted in your soul
And will spring forth,
No matter what,
In ways familiar and mysterious
And filled with pain and joy.

Whether you came here this morning
Filled with grief
Or bursting with new hope,
Whether you regard the future as bright
Or cannot imagine how things might turn out well,
The kingdom of God is planted in your soul.

So I would invite you,
Whatever brought you here today,
To wonder with me for a moment.
Can you see the kingdom springing forth
In your life,
In your relationships,
In this community,
In the world?

It may have lain dormant;
It may, like the date palm,
The royal tree of scripture,

The sign and symbol
Of life and health,
Have been brushed into a corner
To wait for two thousand years.

The kingdom is a mystery,
A parable,
A gift.

We glimpse the kingdom
When hope glimmers in the midst of despair,
When community reaches out towards isolation.
When reconciliation begins.

We can trust these signs of the kingdom.
The kingdom is real.

It will flower forth,
Here and everywhere.
No matter what.