

June 16, 2024

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Mark 4:26-34

St Andrew Lutheran, Beaverton

### **Bacon, Eggs, and Mustard Seeds**

Well, there's a lot to pack into this last sermon at St. Andrew/Quilt Sunday and Father's Day. To begin with, I'm going to share some dad-wisdom, from my own Dad. He told me that these were things he learned from his dad, my Grandpa Ray, in Oklahoma. It's wisdom I try to keep in mind in my personal finance, but it actually applies to church finance, too "If your outgo exceeds your income, your upkeep is going to be your downfall." Another grandfatherly proverb fits rightly sizing up ministry vision: "If we had some bacon, we could have bacon and eggs, if we had some eggs." So, my sermon today is entitled: *Bacon, Eggs and Mustard Seeds*.

Who remembers preschool or kindergarten, and cleaning out an empty half-pint milk carton, cutting off the top, pouring dirt into it, and then burying a lima bean in the dark soil? Do you remember looking at the dirt doubtfully? Nothing interesting is visible for a while. We water the dirt. Now, we have a cup of mud. Not very inspiring. We water it every other day or so, for about ten days. And then, suddenly, a bit of white appears. And then, marvel of marvels: A green sprout emerges. A curled leaf unfolds, and a green stem grows.

We know that soil, sunshine, water, and air make seeds grow into plants. But knowing the science of it, does not capture the mystery. It's a wonder to see new life spring out of the darkness of what was buried. What new life is buried that we can't yet see?

This is a message for our time, and especially a message for this day of transition at St. Andrew. As graduates leave the familiarity of home, and tomorrow, as Pastor Allison Bengfort moves into your Lead Pastor office, and you embark on ministry together; and, as I begin a new ministry in Olympia, we can't see yet, what will emerge. But, it is already happening under the surface. Change, growth, new life is emerging. We can trust that the God of love is at work, healing what was torn apart, pushing through the dirt and compost, and loving new life into being.

In the parable from the Gospel of Mark, you may have noticed that there is some hyperbole happening. First of all mustard seeds are NOT the smallest of seeds. Secondly, they don't grow into trees. A more accurate observation about the mustard seed would be that it spreads quickly by sending out shoots underground. IT can take over a garden or field. It's likely that no farmer would sow it intentionally. It's more of a weed than it is a crop. More helpful to birds, than to kings. That, Jesus says, with a twinkle in his eye: THAT is what the kingdom of heaven is like. Jesus is pushing us to question what's possible, to imagine bigger, bolder, more beautiful things. Jesus shows that the realm of God may be compared to as seemingly insignificant thing – and becoming, by God's grace, something grand and hospitable.

Friends, do you hear that? It's good news! Good news in our aching, breaking, tumultuous world. Wars, political turmoil, false news, climate change-- For any of us who are burdened with worry about the future, or who stress over the adequacy (or inadequacy) of our own efforts, this is consolation and reassurance. Jesus teaches that the reign of God grows on its own, like

the miracle of a seed growing in the earth. We scatter seed — that's our role. The seeds grow, however, whether within us or outside us, by God's grace alone.

As I wind up this first interim pastorate, I'm remembering the leap it took to leave the familiarity of the last ministry I had, which was a stable 20 years in a vital, and loving congregation. Interim ministry is all about transition and change. . . You are in touch with the impermanence of things. And especially, as the end of this rich ministry at St. Andrew began to be apparent, I felt a little like a small lima bean in the dirt. . . In the dark, not knowing what is next. . . And yet, all the while, there was a church in Olympia, in need of a fitting interim pastor. . .

What seeds are growing at St. Andrew? I once heard a pastor say this is a good time to be in the meaning business. And friends, I would say, this is a good time to be in the love business. And by love, I mean engaging with others, in new ways, in deeper ways. Love: meaning vigorous listening, paying attention to others, seeing, serving, caring, doing everything in our power to radiate kindness, compassion, sacrifice for the sake of welcome, and justice. Right now, maybe all we can see is dirt, but life is happening and will emerge. St. Andrew has a wonderful Connections Team. This team is guiding in inspiring new friendships, more sharing of stories, deeper connection to one another, and with your new pastor, discernment where God is calling the church.

The scriptures we heard today suggest that something larger than us, something we can't comprehend or predict, is at work. That is the essence of the realm of God. Despite unpromising beginnings, God is loving the community into being. We can trust in what we can't yet see. Our job is to love. The infinitely great is already active in the infinitely small.

Jesus preached this. He had an unwavering trust that God's hour is approaching. He showed that out of nothing, ignoring all failure, God will complete what has begun.

This is a good time to be in the love business. We are in a difficult time in our world in which injustice, intolerance and cruelty can seem to be winning but, the Gospel calls us to see, to listen, to act as we are able, to the greatest extent of our powers—to plant seeds of love. It's easy to feel worn down and hopeless.

Friends, here are my final words to you: Hold onto what motivates you to act for love and justice. Care for the earth, write postcards, serve meals, make calls, march, donate, register voters, make music, sing harmony, and dance. The seeds are planted. We may not yet see the sprouting hope, but it's no time to tune out.

When I think back on St. Andrew, I will always think of the image of the thriving trees. At the beginning, what we are watering may appear to be a carton full of dirt. But, God is making something new. It's a matter of trusting in what we cannot yet see. What beautiful tree will grow?

*Sing: Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,  
seeds that in dark earth many days have lain;  
Love lives again, that with the dead has been;  
love is come like trees that springeth green!*