

Lectionary B June 14, 2015 Third Sunday after Pentecost
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana
Roberta Meyer

Ezekiel 17:22-24
Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15
2 Corinthians 5:6-10 [11-13] 14-17
Mark 4:26-34

Kaboom!

Don't you just love Jesus? Yes, I know you love Jesus, but I'm talking about the way he tells these little stories called parables and at first we think, "Oh, what a nice story." Then we think about it. And as we think about it again, and all of a sudden it's like a bomb goes off and blows up everything we thought was true. We had it all figured out. We knew exactly what happens when we sow God's seed. We pride ourselves in helping God. We say things like, "We plant the seed." We wear mustard seeds around our necks to show we get it. Kaboom!!!

That's what Eugene Peterson, the author of the Message Bible, says happens. He says that "parables are like narrative time bombs. You hear them – tick – wonder about them – tick – think maybe you've got it – tick – and then as you walk away – tick – or over the course of the next day or so – tick – and all of a sudden the truth Jesus meant to convey strikes home – boom! – almost overwhelming you with its implications blinding you with its vision."

Sometimes, reading another version of a scripture helps me see things in a different way and that is when that time bomb starts ticking. Here is the beginning of our Gospel text from the Message Bible. *"Then Jesus said, "God's kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows—he has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without his help: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain."*

Did you hear that? The planter dude –he or she—has *no idea how it happens.*" Jesus is telling us we don't have a clue. Is Jesus telling us about the wonder of faith or that we should be ready to bring in the harvest? Or you suppose Jesus is telling us that we have absolutely no control over God's kingdom or it's coming, so we better not pull the Christian card to judge who believes and who doesn't. Kaboom!

This way of looking at this parable is scary. We have no control. We are the vulnerable ones here. God's kingdom comes without any effort on our parts, and God's Kingdom cannot be controlled or influenced. It can only be received as a gift. And that means faith is must be a lot more like falling in love than making a decision. Because Jesus is telling us that kingdom-faith, like love, is something that comes from the outside ourselves and grabs hold of us, we don't know what hit us. It is all God's work, not ours.

And that is just the first part of the parable. The second part comes with an even bigger explosion. This tiny little seed grows into a humongous mustard plant. Oh, that's easy, I get it. God's kingdom starts out tiny and grows big, big enough to give shelter to little birds. How cool.

But hold on a minute. Mustard plants are not beautiful plants that everyone wants growing in their gardens. They are not majestic like those Cedars of Lebanon that the Ezekiel and the Psalms described. No. Mustard plants are weeds, unpleasant, unwanted weeds. They invade our gardens and take over. Kaboom!

So what is Jesus saying? The kingdom of God does not come in a nice little package with instructions on it so we know how to control it and make it serve our purposes. No, the kingdom of God is like a weed that invades our lives and moves in and takes over. It is really dangerous. Is that what Jesus is saying?

The kingdom of God is a new reality that invades, overturns, and eventually overcomes the old one. It's a word of promise that creates hope and expectation, leads people to change their jobs to share it, and to leave behind their old ways to live into it. The kingdom is dangerous because you just don't know where it will take you or what you will do when it seizes hold of you. Is this what Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians when he says, *"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"* New is scary. Kaboom!

And don't forget about the birds in this parable. Jesus is not finished yet. We think, "Oh, how nice. Weed or not, that mustard plant provides shelter for those little birds." Think about it. Just before Jesus told this parable, in the same chapter as a matter of fact, Jesus tells the story about the sower scattering the seeds—and who came and ate them all up? The birds! So who are the birds?

These birds might be the undesirables, the folks decent people avoid, the ones we prefer to keep on the other side of our street and, preferably, outside our homes. Yet across Mark's Gospel it just these people who flock to the skingdom Jesus proclaims.

We don't like much to think about this, but the original followers of Jesus were, in the eyes of the culture, all pretty much losers – lowly fishermen, despised tax collectors, prostitutes and criminals, lowlifes loathed by the religious establishment. Maybe that's the way the followers of Jesus have always looked to the rest of the world – those people desperate enough, lowly enough, to find hope in Jesus' message that the kingdom is here to take over with unconditional love for even them.

The theme for the synod assembly this year was, "Breathe, Spirit, Breathe." In the opening worship Bishop Gafjken spoke about how the Holy Spirit is alive and breathing in this world. And like that mustard seed, the Holy Spirit is not ours to control. What can we do? Breathe. Take a deep breath and breathe in the Holy Spirit and then breathe out. In this way we are part of the flow of the Spirit's power in the world. We come together to worship and breathe in pure love and then we go out during the week breathing and being God's children.

The trouble comes when stress causes us to tense up and our breathing becomes shallow. I remember when I had cataract surgery. I was lying there awake, but sedated. I could feel movement, not pain. At times the sensations I felt caused me to tense up. Then I would hear the doctor say, "Breathe, Roberta!" I must have held my breath and my oxygen was low. All I had to do was take a breath and everything was ok again.

That is what the bishop says happens to us. We worry about numbers, and money, or we read the news and hear about devastation and corruption in the community and the world. We stop breathing. He said that the Spirit of Christ isn't who needs resuscitation. Instead, it is the Body of Christ, us, the church who needs resurrection. Our job is to breathe. When Jesus surprised the disciples in that locked room after his resurrection, he greeted them with the gift of peace and he breathed on them. He also breathes on us. Breathing is something that we don't have to work at. We just need to be aware of it. As children of God we consciously breathe in the Spirit of life and we breathe out blessing. We become the breath of God.

The Bishop pointed out that it's not numbers, or revival, or filling the pews that measures success in God's eyes. When we think about those things that's when our breathing shallows. Those things aren't up to us. God is saying, "Just breathe!"

God measures success by the fruit of the Spirit. It has nothing to do with numbers. It is about *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."* This is all pure blessing. When we, the children of God, breathe deeply and exhale calmly God's blessings are spread out all over the place.

You know, there is one more parable in this chapter of Mark. And it is right between the one where the sower scatters the seeds that the birds eat, and the ones we have today where the mustard seed invades and becomes shelter for those rascally birds. It is the one where Jesus tells us not to hide our lights under a bushel.

Bishop Gafjken showed us the sign we saw on the screen earlier in the service. "Be Calm and Follow Jesus"

He is calling us to just breathe in the Spirit's love and exhale that love in all the places we are. It's simple. And natural. And the Bishop pointed out how we are already doing this. Listen. This is how he said it last weekend.

(play the video of the Bishop playing his ukulele and singing "This Little Light of Miine.")

Here is the sign and the video link so that everyone can see it.

<http://livestream.com/accounts/8056179/events/4087973> go to Plenary1 part 2 and start at 33:19 in the video.

The sign is on the next page.



KEEP

CALM

AND

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JESUS