

Proper 6, Year B
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
June 13, 2021
The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13 Psalm 20 2 Corinthians 5:6-10 Mark 4:26-34

There was Pentecost, then Trinity Sunday, and now we are in “the long green season” of Sundays after Pentecost. Green is for growth, and this is a time for us to grow in faith as we hear stories about Jesus’ teaching. Right away we notice that the farmer is throwing seed – scattering it – and we may wonder why the farmer does not sow the seeds in neat rows. Days and nights pass by, and “of itself (verse 28),” all by itself, the seeds grow. We see the growth in dots of green on brown earth, then in green stalks, and at harvest time, in tall plants that have produced a miracle of beauty and sustenance. Through God, the earth yields that which feeds us. Somehow, a seed grows into a plant; yes, there is science in that process; there is also God ... and mystery. Unseen at first, what has been planted grows.

Jesus is speaking parables, so although the story is about growing and harvesting grain, it is also *not* about growing and harvesting grain. “The kingdom of God is ‘as if’”; words to help us understand the deep mystery of God’s kingdom on earth. We know this kingdom through an ancient story and present reality of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The seeds that are scattered are those of God’s kingdom, tiny seeds of faith and hunger for God, and the Holy Spirit plants the grain inside of us. The parable of the mustard seed lets us know that we need only the tiniest seed of God’s kingdom for God to grow our faith into something much larger than ourselves. The “largest of plants” is God, and God is enough to harbor our greatest hopes, to shelter us from scorching heat, to enfold us when we need to heal, to stretch us into scattering God’s love, mercy, and grace absolutely everywhere.

Unlike a plant seed, we have a choice about growing; we can tend that tiniest seed of faith, or not. Part of spiritual growth is in words of scripture. We are called to read, study, and learn scripture – inwardly digest, as a prayer says – to wrestle with the stories, poems and unusual histories, to know Jesus through the words we have been given. It is an ancient story, the story of Christ, and we are bold enough to believe that we really do find life in Christ, and that we can grow in faith far beyond what we can imagine. In reading, study, and prayer we grow in knowledge, grow in faith. We ask the hard questions and search for the answers.

How will we know that it is okay to wrestle with God if you do not know the story of Jacob? What kingdom spreading message we miss if we do not know about Jonah running away from God, being thrown off of a ship, housed and regurgitated by a great whale, and changing the people of an entire city with eight words. Eight words! We would not know Jonah’s disgust at his success. We would miss out on the psalmist’s poetry, their rich words wrapped around emotions of joy, anger, despair, encouragement and hope; there are expressions of every state of being. From that base of the story of the relationship between God and God’s people, we bring the new kingdom to life in the person of God on earth. There are birth stories, faith stories and the miracle of Jesus, life and death and letters to ancient churches. In all of the words of scripture, God is loving God’s people.

Welcome back to being the body of Christ in the world, right here in Greenville, SC. How will our new miracle grow, mature, and bear sustenance and abundance? We are a mostly healthy body right now, and we are emerging in a new way, not in former ways. We are continuing changed by our encounters with Jesus, by our relationship with God and with God’s people – who is every person we meet. We grow, at first unseen, then stretching toward the full stature of Christ. Wherever you are in your faith life is right where you belong, but it is not where you stay. Come in, be embraced by God and by one another. We may need to heal right now. This is the place. We may need friends; they are here. We may need to stop “consuming” our faith and be open to the reality that living into God’s kingdom Christian requires our whole being, our full and enthusiastic “yes.” Consider how to give to *God’s kingdom*. We might need to turn off the television, put away our cell phone, fast

from Twitter or whatever it is that distracts us from God. We will find safe places and challenging places where we might really connect with one another and with our Creator.

A few years ago at summer camp, I was a cabin Mom to 7th -9th graders. In the fun and chaos that is summer camp, those kids experienced a whole lot of God. The staff's entire purpose, really, through song, game, prayer, and the silliest of skits, was to love those kids and to show them how much they are loved. Every evening, in small groups, the campers gathered and talked through a series of questions based on the faith part of each day. In one session, these teenagers: wonder whether or not there is a God, and fear that God might not exist. They worry about their parents' dying, about being alone, about being murdered. They worry that they are not good enough to get into heaven, and they wonder who might actually be there. Their questions are the same as ours, the same as the human family's questions almost from the time of humankind's creation. Where are the answers? Some come from life itself. We live on earth for a time. Living is hard, and messy, joy-filled and sorrow-filled, and everything in-between. We fear being alone. We wonder where God is. And the answers? Some of the answers surround us. We are part of a church family, the very body of Christ, who are together through whatever life brings. "Together" looked different for about fifteen months, didn't it? We were growing, even then. Now we emerge in little bits of green, of life, and stretch into our new way of being.

Love one another in everything. Live into the mystery of faith as we proclaim each week: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Scatter the seeds of God's kingdom everywhere, person by person until God's kingdom is visibly alive and growing right here in Greenville, right here on earth. We carry the tiniest of seeds of the kingdom of God in ourselves. God grows God's kingdom from the unlikeliest of human beings, from Eli, Samuel, Saul, and a ruddy shepherd named David. There are fishermen, women, those who would betray God's son; me and you.

We walk in these days, as Paul writes, by faith and not by sight. We participate in God's view of the world through faith. We are not expected to have God's vision, but through faith to see God everywhere and in everyone. The Church of the Redeemer needs you to be part of our faith walk, part of building the kingdom of God here and beyond these walls. We are the church; scattered in where we live, somewhat diverse in theology, AND one body of Christ in worship and purpose. We need your gifts to build God's kingdom. Do you love to sing? We have a choir. Love to garden? We have grounds to maintain and improve. Have a heart for pets? The pet memorial garden will thrive under your love and care. Love helping others? The outreach committee extends the kingdom through our/your hands and feet. Ready to digest some Scripture? We have a men's bible study, a Zoom bible study, a Wednesday morning Eucharist at which all of your questions are welcome. We have educational offerings from children to adults. What part of the kingdom is growing in you? I encourage you to come together with this community of the Redeemer. Let's watch baseball, serve treats on Sundays, fold bulletins, cook for one another, pray together. Let's talk in small groups and wrestle with the difficult questions. When it is time to sit in the pews, let's do that. God, working in us, will do more than we can ever ask our imagine. Let's discover what part of God's kingdom we are meant to scatter and, through God, allow to grow. Let's grow!

In all things, in the mystery God, thanks be to God!