

Some of you have heard me talk about Mystery and mysticism in regard to faith and the Church. My favourite prayer is the prayer after communion in the BCP where we pray to be living members of the mystical body of Christ. The body of Christ is something beyond our comprehension and knowledge.

So, today, I want to continue that conversation.

We've all heard stories of pets getting lost and finding their way home. We've seen the stories of the beloved pet dog who, when owners have moved from one coast to the other, have made a 3,000-mile trek to find their owners in a location to which they've never been before. They seem to always find their way to their family and to home.

Are you familiar with the Monarch Mystery. I am no lepidopterist but here is what I know about the monarch butterfly. The Monarch is very similar to the beloved family pets that always seem to find their way home.

These insects somehow know how to migrate thousands of miles every autumn, from the Eastern United States/Canada to a handful of sites in Mexico. There, they rest over the winter for the return trip home. But here's the amazing part: No individual butterfly ever goes to Mexico and back, yet thousands converge on the same few sites year after year. These insects know where to go. But none of them has ever been there before. Let's explain.

"Monarchs are not guided by memory, since no single butterfly ever makes the round trip. Three or four generations separate those that spend one winter in Mexico from those that go there the next." A monarch butterfly born in August in New York state, for instance, will fly all the way to Mexico, spend the winter there, and leave in March. Then it will fly north, laying eggs on milkweed along the Gulf Coast in Texas and Florida before dying.

The butterflies born of those eggs will continue northward, breeding and laying more eggs along the way. By August another monarch, four generations or so removed from the monarch that left New York for Mexico the previous summer, will emerge from its chrysalis and do the same thing. It will head south, aiming for a place it's never been, an acre or two of forest on the steep slopes of a particular mountain range.

We are surrounded by mysteries. The great mysteries of the world: Crop circles, the Pyramids, Yeti's, Stonehenge, Loch Ness Monsters, Bermuda Triangles, to name a few. Mysteries are not new and not unique to us in the western world.

As I read through the readings for this week I struggled with what to preach on: was it how God chose David to be king (via Samuel), or was it the parable of the mustard seed. The answer I got through my prayers was "Yes." Yes, I was to preach on both. So, what do these readings have in common? What is their common element? There are two really. One, is the great work God can do through the smallest and least of creation. And the second, is mystery.

It is a complete mystery how and why God chose David to be king. The Israelites asked for a worldly king to help raise up an army to fight their enemies (and the reading that we had last week) and God relented (a mystery unto itself). But then God directed Samuel to the House of Jesse and it is there God directs Samuel to choose the youngest Son David (who apparently was quite handsome). A mystery for sure. The eldest Son was the logical choice to those of us who are linear thinkers and was the expected norm of the day. But even if the eldest was not the best choice, God still skipped over 8 other sons to get to David. Why? I suspect it has something to do with David's "colorful" personality that we see play out later in life.

And then we switch to the parables of our Gospel reading. How a mustard seed works makes no earthly sense. In our reading today, Jesus uses parables to describe the elusive and mysterious quality of the realm of God. Its mystery is described by comparing it with other mysteries.

First, the kingdom of God is like the farmer who scatters seed. As the farmer goes about other business, the seeds sprout and grow into plants. When it is ready, the farmer will harvest it. In Mark's gospel, the farmer plants and harvests but has nothing to do with the growth. Growth is a divine act, hidden and mysterious. We can only plant the seeds of the kingdom. They grow because of God's intention. We see only the harvest.

Then the second parable. The kingdom is like the tiny insignificant mustard seed – the smallest of all seeds. Once planted, in a season, it will grow into a shrub large enough "so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." It becomes useful beyond itself. Again, the wonder is contained in

the seed whose growth is determined by God.

The growth of the kingdom is a mystery considering our small part in the planting.

THAT the kingdom grows outside of our control and **THAT** it grows so prolifically are mysteries to us who cannot wrap our minds around **WHAT** the kingdom actually is.

We spend a lot of our time and energy trying to guess the outcomes and worrying about the outcomes of our actions/plans. The beauty of kingdom living is that we live today as if the prayer has already been answered, the plan complete and the challenges overcome. This is what it means to live in the mystery. Mystery means we don't need the answers. We trust something greater is at work.

Our two readings today, are about littleness and mystery. In the scheme of things, we as a Church are little. As a denomination we are little. Just think, what potential lies in giving voice to the smallest but persistent of witnesses? What extravagant hospitality can we offer that express our commitment and describe our deepest hopes not only for our church but for the world beyond its walls!

As you look at your own life and the life of your faith family or denomination, when were there moments along the way where you could feel God's hand at work, mysteriously, making choices and offering possibilities that no one would have predicted or thought of on their own? When were you small and perhaps feeling insignificant, and yet, in the end, chosen?

Never discredit the good work God can and will do through each of us.

Learn to celebrate and live in the mystery. A mystery is not something to be solved - a very western and modern concept - it is to be lived and practiced faithfully, because there is so much we do not and cannot know.

My friends, I would rather live in a world where my life is surrounded by mystery than live in a world I believed to be so small that my mind could comprehend it. Amen.

