

Planting Kingdom of God Seeds  
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Mark 4:26-34

26He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

30He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.

33With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples

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The growth of a seed is often a miraculous mystery to us, especially if you're like me and you aren't necessarily a science or biology person. Whenever I think about seeds and sprouts, it reminds me of one of my favorite Disney Pixar movies, Wall-E. Wall-E is this sweet robot scavenging and trash compacting on post-apocalyptic, trash ridden earth when he finds a small sprout of a plant, the very last plant on earth and the hope that people, who have abandoned earth because of all of the trash could return to earth because it might be able to sustain life again.

There is something inherently hopeful about a seed that has been planted that turns into a sprout and eventually grows into a plant because it represents new life.

The parable of the mustard seed is this same imagery. A tiny little mustard seed is planted into the ground. And it grows into a large bushy plant spreading wide and growing heartily. The mustard seed is tenacious it isn't quite the giant that the text depicts at its tallest it is 6 feet. And it is essentially a weed. It is scruffy and not particularly glamorous or beautiful. It is no cedar tree or redwood.

And yet, this is what Jesus chooses to compare the kingdom of God to. A hopeful, yet tiny seed planted into the ground that will grow to be this bushy weed, spreading far and wide, a place where the birds of the air can find shade and rest.

As I was reading the parable of the mustard seed this week, I was curious about what our role in it is. Who sows it upon the earth? Is that just God's job or do we play some part in it?

And what is a kingdom of God seed?

Perhaps we must start with what is the kingdom of God.

In the parable, the kingdom of God becomes a place where the birds of the air and the people can find shade and rest and where they can gather together.

The kingdom of God comes to earth first with Jesus, when we take part in believing in God's abundant grace and when we follow Jesus' commandment to love one another as we have been loved.

And so we work with God to plant the seeds. Each and every one of us.

While I was still in seminary, I had this really difficult conversation with a friend. You see she did not think that LGBTQ, an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people should be allowed to be pastors. And that conversation surprised me and it made me very sad as well because I went to seminary with some lovely LGBTQ people who were going to be pastors. And who in my opinion were going to become very good pastors.

She and I had this pretty difficult exchange, where we went back and forth. I tried to remind her that never once does Jesus condemn people for their sexual identity. In Paul's letters the practice is condemned because it wasn't consensual and in Biblical Times between two people with unequal power, Sodom and Gomorrah is a story about rape.

And yet, nothing was convincing. She believed what she believed. And there was nothing that was going to make her budge.

And so I struggled to come to terms with that and to choose to love her because she too was a beloved child of God. And yet, myself as someone who was raised in a different time and place and in a family who never questioned the equality and ability of LGBTQ people, I was saddened.

It was maybe a year after she and I had this conversation that I heard from a friend that she had welcomed a pastoral figure into her life who had just recently come out as LGBTQ.

I was a little more than stunned. I remembered back to our conversation and I think maybe that could have been part of the seed that was planted but I think more so the seed that was planted was the gift of this person in their life, a relationship with someone different from themselves who allowed them to see that the love of God could come from a place that they didn't think was possible.

The seed was a nurturing relationship that opened the door for the kingdom of God to grow. God put that person in their life. And it created something that looked like what Jesus commands to us, "love your neighbor as yourself."

A command that is a piece of the kingdom of God.

A kingdom that provides shade and rest, a kingdom where all can gather together under its canopy.

A kingdom that, like that little sprout in Wall-E is a hopeful reminder that all might have life and have it abundantly.

But there is another part to this mustard seed parable. It requires not only us to work with God to plant the seeds, but also to believe that the smallest of seeds can grow into the biggest of plants or ideas or changes, to have that spark of hope.

The spark of hope comes when we believe that something so small can grow into something so tenacious and large and wide-spreading.

And that ability for the mustard seed to grow and for the kingdom of God to grow, is not dependent on us alone. For our kingdom of God seeds to grow, we must have faith that God is at work and that the seeds will not only bless those around us but that in turn we will be blessed by them.

At the end of Wall-E all of the people return to the earth and they plant that little tiny sprout that Wall-E and his companion Eve have sought to protect throughout the movie. They believe that even on this planet that has been destroyed by pollution and trash, that this little seed will be their lifeline, that it will restore the earth and bring forth life for them.

Believing in the kingdom of God is like this, it doesn't always seem like the smartest choice or the one with maybe the best odds. And in a world where we too have faced illness that has driven us to isolation, political turmoil that has torn us apart, and conflict over the worth and dignity of people of color, LGBTQ people, and people in poverty.

It's not hard to identify with the feeling that having faith in a small action growing into the kingdom of God is trivial or silly or foolish or at times a worth-less endeavor. It's easy to disbelieve that any tiny seed could make any difference in the face of the adversity that it will come across.

And yet, Jesus wasn't trying to prove that the mustard seed and the kingdom of God were the most desirable or conventionally profitable. But nonetheless Jesus compares the kingdom of God to the mustard bush. A plant that begins small, but spreads with weedy and busy tendrils far and wide.

It is not always our job to know how the seeds of the kingdom of God will grow, where they will spread to and how far they will reach. It is our job as people of faith to believe in the hope of planting them in the first place. Amen.