

## **Raising Seedlings**

Ezekiel 17: 22-24

Mark 4: 26-34

June 16, 2024

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

### *Ezekiel 17: 22-24*

Thus says the Lord God: I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind. All the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord. I bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree; I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken; I will accomplish it.

### *Mark 4: 26-34*

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

He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet 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.”

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

--

When Monique and Justin were preschoolers, we planted a tiny garden of carrots. As gardening newbies, we attempted just a single crop. In the early spring we prepared the soil in just the perfect spot that would be sunny six to eight hours a day, planted the seeds a few inches apart from one another, watered them, and then roped off the area as a gentle reminder of where little feet should not be running through.

What I had expected to be lessons about where our food comes from, and taking care of a garden, and patience for green growth and harvest time just proved to be too much. Waiting a few weeks from seed to snack with the unknown magic happening underground in the dirt was just too much for my little ones. Impatience and curiosity got to them, and after about three weeks, they dug the carrots up to see how they were doing. They were excited yet disappointed by the tiny little stubs of infant carrots that could not be eaten, nor could they be replanted. In spite of all their wishing, they just could not make their carrots grow any faster.

The lesson that we cannot really control what we plant—in a garden, in life--first began for my children before they even stepped onto the bus for kindergarten, but it is a lesson we keep learning and re-learning over our lifetime. We can help to nurture growth along. We can weed out what is a bad influence on growth. We can water and compost for healthy growth. But we cannot rush growth. Growth happens on its own time, in its own way. It takes time. It takes patience. Roots and cells and development takes a power beyond us, beyond our understanding.

It takes our Creator. The seed will sprout and grow, but we do not know how. All we can do is work, wait, and see what will grow.

In many ways Jesus was saying what the people already knew. Seeds, planting, tending, growing, harvesting, storing, were the life cycle that kept them fed, or at times of famine left them hungry. But on this day, Jesus took the everyday to teach about the extraordinary.

“The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day. “

The one who sows is not the One who grows. God’s kingdom is a pure gift. We can do nothing to cajole, to coax, it into being. God’s kingdom will take root where and when and how God chooses—whether that root is in a human heart or in the world. Even the tiny mustard seed, the small and the vulnerable, will have an essential place in God’s kingdom. From even the tiniest seed planted in a soul, the Kingdom of God can grow so that the person who trusts in God is a source of nourishment and care for others<sup>i</sup> as a spiritual cultivation.

The ancient prophesy of Ezekiel echoed and resonated as all the trees of the field know that the Lord is God who accomplishes all of this. God promises that the tender shoot will become a “noble cedar,” providing nesting shelter to every kind of winged creatures, providing the inclusion of all in God’s restoration, in God’s love and care for all creation.<sup>ii</sup>

In our own time-- when few of us are tied to a life of crop growing, when for most people gardens are a choice rather than a need-- we can still grasp Jesus’ connection between field cultivation and spiritual cultivation as our spiritual lives and worshiping communities also do not burst forth fully formed, and certainly not by our efforts alone. Like farming, like gardening, tending our spiritual communities requires hard work, and more than a bit of luck. There are times when we sow our seeds, and we can only wait for them to grow. It takes patience, a generous patience, to be in that in-between, dark and fertile growing time, to not dig up the carrots just beginning to grow, as spiritual communities, as churches, are seeds planted by God, growing and blooming in God’s own time and way. God’s kingdom grows slowly and demands patience and faith. We are reminded that when the growth, the progress, the blooms, we are waiting for come too slowly, God is not impatient with our growth. It’s all happening on God’s time.

It’s also happening in God’s own way. It’s said that as much as 75% of a planter’s efforts are wasted, as it is only 25% that takes root and thrives.<sup>iii</sup> Even with the greatest of care and green thumb, growth sometimes does not happen, or if it does, it does not happen well. Yet we all have seen those ‘volunteer plants’ that come up in absurd, unexpected ways. A flowering plant that is dying is tossed outside for the squirrels and chipmunks, yet it soon takes root in the untended dirt, and thrives. Volunteer plants are known to pop up out of compost bins and forgotten corners of the yard. Squirrels and birds leave little presents that sometimes grow up into a zucchini in the middle of the tomato plants. Even with all our preparation, growth happens in ways that we don’t expect. The Holy Spirit will make its way up in tiny shoots and tendrils in the most unexpected places.<sup>iv</sup>

For a church, for that one small part towards God’s kingdom, that is reassuring good news as sometimes what we have planted as a ministry, as an outreach, thrives and blossoms and blooms, although sometimes it does not. Yet we also find successes in places we did not plant, but God sowed for us.

For the plowing, sowing, reaping, silent growth while we are sleeping, future needs in earth’s safekeeping, thanks be to God<sup>v</sup>. Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> <https://sacredspace.com/scripture/mark-426-34>

<sup>ii</sup> Julián Andrés González Holguín ~ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-11-2/commentary-on-ezekiel-1722-24-6>

<sup>iii</sup> C. Clifton Black ~ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-11-2/commentary-on-mark-426-34-6>

<sup>iv</sup> Chrissy Cataldo ~ <http://www.wccucc.org/sermon-blog/sermon-for-61415-tiny-seeds-and-large-branches-mark-426-34>

<sup>v</sup> Fred Pratt Green ~ *For the Fruit of All Creation*