

Sunday, June 14, 2015
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – " From this tiny seed"

A mustard seed is very small.

A mustard tree grows slowly over time providing a wide canopy of branches and leaves at maturity.

It is an apt description for the possibilities of our faith – most of us start with something small and build up over time to a place where we can articulate our faith and find comfort in our relationship with God.

Seeds are such an intriguing metaphor for our own development.

Every plant, flower, tree starts as a seed and then develops into what it was intended to be.

Could that be the same for us?

Do we start as something small and with the right nurturing and care grow into what God intended us to be?

What seed is germinating in you?

What care might be needed to bring it to full fruit?

Jesus' seed parables inspire a sense of wonder illustrating God's mysterious power to take small things and make them great.

He compares the reign of God with the mysterious, hidden way of a seed's growth, small, and often buried or overlooked, but with great power within.

Jesus used these parables to teach the crowds of learned and unlearned, rich and poor, downtrodden and powerful.

He uses the power of story as an effective way to preach something as hard to describe, let alone define, as the kingdom of God.

My own faith story is truly one of the tiniest seed being nurtured, nourished and allowed to flourish.

As many of you know, I was raised in the Catholic church – part of a dutiful family that attended mass and religious education class weekly until I left for college.

I have to believe that a small seed was planted in me during those early years, for 20 years later, after I had children, I felt a yearning to know God.

I went back to the church of my childhood with a more open heart and slowly cultivated a faith that would come to sustain me in the years ahead.

In 2000, at the age of 42 my faith was tested when I was diagnosed and subsequently operated on and treated for a brain tumor.

The small seed of faith that had been germinating flourished as I learned to trust God with my life.

A few years later I was led by the Holy Spirit to enroll in Yale Divinity School, which eventually led to my affiliation with the United Church of Christ.

Again, by allowing God's grace to flow through me, I was introduced to opportunities that I would have never imagined.

In 2004 – 11 years ago this week, my mother died of ovarian cancer.

Once again, I had to trust God with my life.

Through my mother's illness and death, I leaned on my faith.

I was held up by my church family and my relationship with God.

The branches of my mustard tree were beginning to grow.

The canopy was starting to form.

I felt protected.

I felt safe.

I was secure in the knowledge that God was in charge.

Two years after my mother died I was ordained – what some would see as the culmination of a faith journey, but it turns out to have only been the beginning.

My faith has continued to grow, to flourish, to expand beyond anything that I would have imagined 20 years ago when I walked back into church.

Jesus uses this parable to reassure his audience that God is in control, no matter how things appear.

No matter what we do or don't do, Jesus assures us that we can trust the One who works even while we sleep.

I can affirm his message.

In Mark's gospel we hear that all the farmer has to do is scatter the seed on the ground.

The real focus is the interaction between the seed and the soil.

I'm sure there are some hard working farmers who would argue with the idea that we are simply called to participate in what God is doing in the world.

However, the message is truly that we are called to co-create with God.

Matthew Fox wrote

"...Creativity is not a noun or even a verb—it is a place, a space, a gathering, a union, a where—wherein the Divine powers of creativity and the human power of imagination join forces, Where the two come together is where beauty and grace happen and, indeed, explode. Creativity constitutes the ultimate in intimacy, for it is the place where the Divine and the human are most destined to interact."

What seed is germinating in you?

What care might be needed to bring it to full fruit?

Both readings today, David's call to reign over Israel and the insignificant seeds planted in the earth, call us to value the small, the insignificant, the hidden.

Every act of service, every gesture of love, every gift we give has value and makes a difference in building God's kingdom in our communities as well as in our own hearts.

We may not think we are talented or well-known or wealthy or well-connected, but we all have fruit that we can produce and that God can use – often in ways we that we won't even know.

The invitation, then, is to learn to value our small efforts and contributions as God does, and to stay faithful even when we don't see the results of our work.

Barbara Brown Taylor, writing on this parable, suggests that we create anxiety in our lives by losing faith that God will turn those small seeds into hearty plants.

She warns that we can't rush creation, nor can we wrest control of it away from God. "What is absent when anxiety is present," she writes, "is faith...that God will be God, that the automatic earth will yield its fruit, that life can be trusted."

While Taylor says the antidote to anxiety is courage, I would argue that it is patience.

For when you chose patience, perhaps with courage, over and over again, every day that you live, your seeds will bear fruit and you will then have more seeds to scatter.

It can be a scary thing, admitting to having little control over what goes on in our lives... But that's what faith is about.

Each day, God is breaking into our lives, changing us.

Often times, we don't even realize it's happening.

One of the great benefits of acknowledging that God is in charge is that we are less likely to complain.

It is pretty presumptuous to argue with God – to think that you know better than God what you need.

Lately, I have noted a pervasive culture of complaining.

Once I started naming it – recognized that it existed – it only became more apparent.

A few weeks ago someone asked me what issue people were most often struggling with when they came to see me as the Pastor.

I wanted to respond that it was deep theological questions, or spiritual yearnings, but I found myself saying that most often people were complaining about other people.

I was startled by my own response and then I started thinking about how much conversation in our lives is spent complaining about something – the weather, the stock market, the politicians, our kids, our spouses, our health.

I had to stop and think about how this must all sound to God.

What would God hear if he tuned into your life for a day?

Would he hear thanks and praise?

Would he hear questions about how to grow closer or how to be a better follower?

I want us to be a joyful company of disciples.

I want us to move through life filled with gratitude for all that we have.

A story from 5th century BC tells of a mother who has lost a son. She takes his body to the Buddha to find a cure. The Buddha asks her to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a family that has never lost a child, husband, parent, or friend. When the mother is unable to find such a house in her village, she realizes that death and heartache is common to all.

Ancient Jewish texts compare the knowable universe to the size of a mustard seed to demonstrate the world's insignificance and to teach humility.

Lessons that we can take to heart.

My friends, tend to your seeds of faith.

Nurture them.

Nourish them.

Let them flourish and provide a wide canopy of protection for you from life's ills.

Learn how to nourish your neighbor's seeds – look for ways to spread goodness and kindness in the world.

The next time you feel like complaining – picture yourself talking to God and telling God that you don't think he is doing a very good job.