

June 14, 2009 Our Savior's Lutheran Church Hermosa, SD

Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:6-17; Mark 4:26-34

The Kingdom of God is like a weed!?

In the movie, "Pursuit of Happyness," Will Smith's character does become successful, but not until he's traveled a long road of faithfulness in order to take care of his son. When you see his character's struggle at the beginning of the movie, you wonder why he just doesn't give up. You wonder, "Who does he think he is anyway?" At the same time you wonder how he does what he does, you cheer him on, wanting him to succeed because he is fighting against a time and a place that sees him as a weed instead of a tall, strong cedar tree. And yet, amazingly enough, he doesn't have to be a tall strong cedar, as written about in the Ezekiel passage; he not only takes care of his young son, but he finds success in the business world. Those around him probably wondered how in the world he could do what he did. We have learned through the history of our own country that judging someone on appearances is not only hurtful, it is sinful. A people that has been considered "less than" is actually "equal to" – a lesson that we, as a society, seem to have to learn over and over again.

And yet these parables are more than how we treat one another in relationship and more than what it means to succeed in the world. We know that it is not about success in the worldly sense. Mother Teresa is quoted as saying, "I do not pray for success, I ask for faithfulness." One of the amazing things about the parable of the mustard seed is not simply the fact that something so small can grow because any seed is small and turns into amazing things. The amazing thing is that Jesus would compare the kingdom of God to a mustard plant. Faithfulness is the success that Jesus' followers look for. It is the kind of faithfulness that takes something as unassuming as a mustard plant, a common weed (like dandelions, crabgrass or sagebrush), and says that God's kingdom is like a weed!

So many times we judge on the basis of outward appearances and so many times we are incorrect on those judgments. God can take something that is considered a weed and do great things with it. For God even took shame and death and

turned it into life everlasting! God even took his son not to bring in the reign of God through power and might, but through suffering and death. It always seems that God loves to turn things upside down. We seem to stumble upon the good news as we'd stumble over unassuming stubble of weed on our journey through life – the growth of the kingdom of God is in God's hands, not ours. Yes, we are called to share the good news with others and hope that God through relationship with Christ and the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit will grow the Word in those who hear it. But it is about what God does, not what we do!

We are lucky enough today to witness and participate in the baptism of a young child, Grace Marie Lawrence. What better way to know that God is the one reaching out to us through the promise of the Son than in baptism! For it is not only the water, but the water with the Word of God that saves! And God invites us to be a part of this amazing promise! For, it is the planting and proclaiming of faith that we will witness today. The growth, well, that will be left to God, but we who are here today will make promises to pray for and support Grace and her family and their continued discovery of God's love for them.

A MODERN JEWISH PARABLE: WE UNDERSTAND BUT LITTLE

from *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore: Stories, Traditions, Legends, Humor, Wisdom and Folk Songs of the Jewish People*, Edited by Nathan Ausubel Copyright, 1948, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York

All their lives the two young brothers had lived in the city behind great stone walls and never saw field or meadow. But one day they decided to pay a visit to the country.

As they went walking along the road they saw a farmer at his plowing. They watched him and were puzzled.

"What on earth is he doing that for!" they wondered. "He turns up the earth and leaves deep furrows in it. Why should someone take a smooth piece of land covered with nice green grass and dig it up?"

Later they watched the farmer sowing grains of wheat along the furrows.

"That man must be crazy!" they exclaimed. "He takes good wheat and throws it into the dirt."

"I don't like the country!" said one in disgust. "Only crazy people live here."

So he returned to the city.

His brother who remained in the country saw a change take place only several weeks later. The plowed field began to sprout tender green shoots, even more beautiful and fresher than before. This discovery excited him very much. So he wrote to his brother in the city to come at once and see for himself the wonderful change.

His brother came and was delighted with what he saw. As time passed they watched the sproutings grow into golden heads of wheat. Now they both understood the purpose of the farmer's work.

When the wheat became ripe the farmer brought his scythe and began to cut it down. At this the impatient one of the two brothers exclaimed: "The farmer is crazy! He's insane! How hard he worked all these months to produce this lovely wheat, and now with his own hands he is cutting it down! I'm disgusted with such an idiot and I'm going back to the city!"

His brother, the patient one, held his peace and remained in the country. He watched the farmer gather the wheat into his granary. He saw him skillfully separate the grain from the chaff. He was filled with wonder when he found that the farmer had harvested a hundred-fold of the seed that he had sowed. Then he understood that there was logic in everything that the farmer had done.

The moral of this Jewish parable: Mortals see only the beginning of any of God's works. Therefore they cannot understand the nature and the end of creation.

We, too, cannot not understand all of God's work and how (or when) it's going to be. What we do know is what God has already done for us. He sent his Son (which some considered a weed, a nothing, something to be destroyed), and God turned shame and death into life eternal and peace everlasting. We wait upon the Lord in anticipation of what is to come. We can wait because we rest in the promise of a God who turns things upside down for the sake of those he loves – his weeds – his children.

Helpful Resources

1. "Relationship to Christ is the work of Christ." And "The growth of the reign of God is in God's hands, not ours. We do our work, but growth is finally up to God." *Pulpit Resource*. Willimon, William H.
2. *Texts for Preaching. A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV-Year B*. Brueggemann, Cousar, Gaventa and Newsome.
3. Exegetical Notes at [Cross Marks Christian Resources](#). Stoffregen, Brian P.