

June 14 B 2015

I'm a city boy. I grew up in Albert Lea. In town.

I'm not a country boy. I don't know the first thing about farming.

However, one of my friends grew up on a farm. His name was Jeff Renchin.

When you are at Jeff's house, then you did the chores with him.

When in Rome...

So, for the record, I have slopped out pig pens...washed and sanitized milking equipment...and hauled bales of hay.

The closest I ever came to growing things was the summer when I worked on a 4-H vegetable project.

I took over one of my mom's flower gardens and planted corn.

You don't often see corn stalks in the middle of town...right next to a house.

But one summer you did.

My grandparents, however, were all about growing things.

My maternal grandfather, his entire backyard was a vegetable garden.

The one rule was repeated often, for my benefit: Don't play in the garden.

My paternal grandfather, his entire backyard was a flower garden.

The one rule was repeated often, for my benefit: Don't play in the garden.

These days, the closest I get to growing anything are the potted plants on the back deck.

Last month, RitaRae and I went to our favorite greenhouse and bought plants.

We planted them in ten different pots on the back deck.

Sitting on the swing, we've been enjoying them...our little garden paradise.

This week, we noticed that one pot of lilies was growing a lot slower than the other pot of lilies. I wonder why that is?

We noticed that the soil was pretty soggy.

So I got out my trusty drill...and drilled a hole into the bottom of the pot.

As soon as I did: Whoosh...the water just poured out.

Drilled a second hole: whoosh.

Drilled a third hole: whoosh.

Water-logged. Bad drainage. Now, the soil isn't soggy any more.

Learned something.

We'll have to see if those lilies catch up with the other pot.

I remember...years ago...when I traced my genealogy back fifteen generations. Fifteen generations ago, my ancestors were all farmers in southern Germany. Back then, I suppose, everybody farmed. If you wanted to eat, you farmed. These days, everybody is specialized. You're a pastor. You're a miner. You're a teacher. You're a nurse. You're an accountant. And you put your paycheck in the bank and spend part of it at Super One...to buy your food. Fifteen generations ago, everybody grew their own food.

That's how it was in Jesus' day...everyone farmed. Because everyone wanted to eat. So when Jesus told parables, earthly stories with heavenly meanings, he often used gardening images to communicate his point. And they would have understood. The fourth chapter of Mark is full of these garden parables. You heard two of them in our gospel reading this evening/morning. The first parable plays on the time between planting and harvest. While the farmer may cultivate his field, after the seed has been planted, he has minimal control of the natural process. The growth of the plants will come at their own time...but it will come. The harvest will happen...The farmer must be patient.

Since Jesus told this story in reference to the kingdom of God, I wonder what he was trying to communicate. I think...it might have had something to do with Jesus' public ministry in Galilee. It may have seemed to the disciples that Jesus' ministry was not bearing fruit. The kingdom of Jesus did not look at all like great King David's reign. Maybe Jesus' followers were tempted to force the growth. Be patient, Jesus told the first disciples in the parable. The kingdom will come as surely as harvest follows planting. Until it does, you can only wait...Growth cannot be coerced.

I wonder...might Jesus be teaching us that same truth twenty centuries later. The kingdom of God does not unfold according to our plans and wishes. God's kingdom unfolds according to God's plan. I love how Jesus describes the farmer in verse 27:
the seed will sprout and grow, he does not know how.

The farmer doesn't know how it works...it just does.
God's ways will happen...God's salvation will be made known.
Because God is great.
And it will not be according to your plan.
So be patient...it will happen.

And if that's true for the kingdom, God's rule and reign...
I wonder if it's true for all of life with which God has blessed us.
Patience, huh? Trust in God, hmmm?
Live hopefully, confidently, positively...you think?
The seed will sprout and grow, you know not how.

In the second seed parable, Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a tiny mustard seed.

When planted, the mustard seed produces the largest of all garden shrubs...
Large enough to provide protection for birds.

So this agricultural image picks up on the mustard seed's humble beginning and magnificent conclusion.

In the historical context of the first century, this little parable comments on the relationship between Jesus' mission and the coming kingdom of God.

Once again, the question the parable addresses is not whether the kingdom will come.

The question is whether Jesus' efforts have anything to do with the kingdom.
His movement seemed so small and insignificant.

Just wait, Jesus promised.

The mustard seed is tiny, but once planted, it will produce a glorious shrub.

The kingdom of God, with Christ at its head, started small...but is growing huge.

What is required of the faithful is patience that arises from hope.

Do you think that's a truth you need to hear today? I know I do.

The problems are so immense.

The needs are so great.

The faith to respond seems so weak.

The money is short. The energy is spent.

The values are so confused.

The self-centeredness is so predominant.

And that's just me...I haven't even started talking about you.

But, you see...God is at work.

The Holy Spirit creates faith miraculously that no one can see.

And using Jesus' organic image of seed planting, there will be progression...and growth...

And what didn't look like much at first...will end up magnificent in the end.

Even the birds will find their rest.

In Jesus, God plants the seed of faith in you...and waits patiently.

The seed will sprout and grow, we do not know how.