Things that Matter: The Little Things

Psalm 92

Mark 4: 26-34

Jesus made a habit of talking in parables. Parables tell a story by using a variety of literary means – comparisons or allegory. It may contain hyperbole or exaggeration. Often there is a subtext – that is an implicit undertone that creates tension in the story. A parable is a kind of metaphor – that is it speaks to telling what a moral point is like. It can also be thought of as an analogy - that is a kind of argument that comes to a general conclusion rather than a particular one.

Jesus used parables. But they are also used in other religious and spiritual traditions as well as in academic disciplines like economics and philosophy.

Parables are about how we see things. So let me ask you what do you see?

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| http://images.cpcache.com/merchandise/514_400x400_NoPeel.jpg?region=name:FrontCenter,id:33120471,w:16 | What does this look like? Is it a vase or 2 faces or maybe a table? |
|  | What about this? A mountain in the dessert or a cat eyeing its prey? |
|  | Or this? A duck or a rabbit? |
| Picture it & Write! | Ermilia | Page 8 | Or this? A young woman or an old woman?  |
| I Semi da cui ricaviamo gli "antiossidanti" | We can all be looking at the same thing and see different things. And then after we’ve seen one thing, another emerges. Look at these seeds. They sunflower seeds. So when you hear that what do you think of? |
| Fun Monday – 8.14 | Slices from the PearLady | This? |
| File:A <strong>sunflower</strong>.jpg - Wikipedia | Or this? |
| freedom | Outward and Visible | When I was a child and I heard the story about the mustard seed, I saw in my mind’s eye a small speck  |
| WayCoolScience7 - November Science Discoveries, JCC | and then I heard – as in Matthews’s gospel that the seed becomes a great tree. I imagined a Redwood. But that is not exactly what scripture says. We see things and then we use our own experience and abilities to see things. |

Jesus tells several parables with seeds. At the beginning of Mark 4 there is the parable of the sower –

*“Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.”*

And then Jesus said: *Let anyone with ears to hear listen!*

In the reading for today Jesus speaks of seeds in 2 ways:

First as a direct corollary – the kingdom of God is as if someone scattered seeds and they grew. They don’t fall on rocky ground or get eaten by birds. They just grew and the grain is harvested.

The second is that a small seed can produce a great thing.

What we can find is about what God has prepared. And it is also about what we expect.

Seeds are really pretty mundane things. Small. But in them springs so much life.

Jesus talked about them casually and yet with profound implications – throw them out and from them will come life. The seed can be in peril. But the seed contains the possibility and potential for all sorts of things.

It really doesn’t matter what the size of the seed is – it is the function and the fruit. Small things are important.

We all have gifts and abilities. Sometimes they may seem small. You may not think of yourself as smart as a colleague or as funny as a friend or as strong as your sibling or as good as your hero. But what you do have matters. What you may think of as small may in reality be just enough.

It is important in our time to ponder what seeds we are and how we are sown in the world. It is Shallowford Presbyterian Church in Atlanta but just recently began serving Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. Chris suggests that there is another way to think about Jesus’ talk of seeds. It is not simply that we may be seed the God scatters, but it is also possible that we are sowers of seeds in the world. What we have in fruit and ability can be scattered around to others in our family, church, community and world.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Thinking of seeds this way is a challenge – for it mixes the metaphors of the parables that Jesus uses. If you were an English teacher and I turned in a draft of this sermon as a paper with a mixed metaphor you would grade me down, maybe even fail me for mixing metaphors. But I am not giving this to you to be graded. I am giving this to you as encouragement.

You are both - a seed that God has planted in the world with gifts and abilities. You may feel that others have greater gifts. But I am here to tell you that whatever gift or ability you have, it is important. It is important to you. And it is important to the other people in your life.

You are also a sower. God has given your things to share in the world, seeds to cast out and watch them sprout.

The apostle Paul wrote about fruits. One of the most memorable passages is in Galatians 5:

 *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.*

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount - *you will know them by their fruits.*

Fruits come from seeds.

So what kind of fruit do you want to produce? What kind of fruit do you grow? I am tempted to leave things here. My hope is that I have given you something to ponder in your own life. But there is something more. We all know that we live in times of great challenge. Polarities and disagreements are all around.

This week our Attorney General of the US, Jeff Sessions, defended a practice of the government by citing scripture. One of the hallmarks of the Protestant Reformation is that each person has the privilege of engaging with God through Jesus Christ. Scripture in the Bible provides for us the way for this conversation.

Yet reading the Bible has all sorts of challenges. I f for example, we took the Attorney General’s argument at its face value – that all governments are instituted by God and therefore should be obeyed – and thought about American history, we might come up wanting on any number of points. For example – if that is the case, then what about the British colonists in the 1770s who supported revolution against the British Empire. The Empire were the rulers and made the laws. But the colonists knew them to be unjust, punitive and vengeful. Many of the colonists – who included quite a few Presbyterians – knew there was a need for justice in any rule of law. [[2]](#footnote-2)

As Presbyterian Christians we affirm the necessity and right for individuals to study scripture. But when we speak of God’s will, we also know that it is something that grows and is learned among the community of faith. As Christians we cannot overlook the ways in which our ancestors in faith have argued and studied about scripture. Nor can we not listen to the other voices within scripture.[[3]](#footnote-3) In this case, there are many verses to quote about how the children of Israel were to welcome the alien and stranger within their midst and not to ignore their needs. If the attorney General had just continued his quotation of Romans 13 he would have found this writing:

*Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*

A Presbyterian hallmark of scripture interpretation is that scripture must be used to interpret scripture.

These are all seeds. What kind of seeds do you want to sow in the world? Yes, there is a need for protecting and providing for those we love. Does that mean there is no way to produce a fruit from the seeds of mercy, grace, goodness and love that will change how we live in the world, not by the old standards of retribution but the new fruit of God’s love with us?

Thanks be to God.

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1. <http://day1.org/8215-chris_henry_faith_in_a_seed> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. What Jeff Sessions Got Wrong When Quoting the Bible. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/06/15/what-jeff-sessions-got-wrong-when-quoting-the-bible/?utm_term=.c9caffff767b> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture, 1983. <https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/_resolutions/scripture-use.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)