

Eleventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

Mustard Seed

June 17, 2018

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Jesus seems to have had a thing about mustard seeds. Elsewhere he tells his apostles that if they had faith the size of a mustard seed, they could move mountains. Today he compares the Kingdom of God to mustard seeds. He did so, or at least people remembered what he said when he did so, because in his day it would have been such an arresting metaphor.

For mustard seeds were weeds. Now it had some use as a spice, and so some farmers would plant fields of them. But for the wheat and barley farmers, for the vineyards and the pastures mustard seeds were a nuisance. The seeds are so small and light, they get picked up by the wind and spread far and wide. And they sprout so easily and grow so quickly and so big, they were seen more as a curse than a blessing.

But Jesus teaching was like a mustard seed. As mustard seeds were carried by the wind hither and yon, he wandered around the rural villages of Galilee, his word taking root here and there in the most modest places, among the most unlikely of people. Nor was he an ordained priest, highly educated and officially certified, like me, he preached where ever he pleased to whoever would listen. In fact the less reputable, the less educated, the sicker and more infirm his audience, the more likely his words would take root and sprout. He could get through even to those others shunned as crazy and possessed, those who even their own families had given up on. He could get through to them better than to the priests and rabbis, the lettered and the wealthy. The owners of those fields and vineyards, would have heard about Jesus, but it was their tenant farmers and field hands who had ears that could hear, eyes that could see what he was really about. Religious authorities and civic leaders would catch wind of him, but it was the homeless and the homebound who were

the more effected by his words.

For what Jesus had to say, is what people on the outs most needed to hear. That grace is a gift not a reward. That it is poor and the heavily burdened, rather than the rich and the mighty who are truly blessed. That it is the meek and the humble, not the aggressive and the proud who are closer to God. For it is the sick who know they need a doctor.. It is the lost who need finding. It is those who know they are sinners, who are ready to turn their lives around, to repent and believe the good news.

Now for those of us who have our lives together, or for those parts of ourselves that are healthy and talented, Jesus also addresses us. In the first parable today he compares that same Kingdom of God to the conscientious farmer, who works his fields and has his life in order. But this farmer also knows that his work and discipline can only take him so far. He can work the ground but he must trust in God to bring his all his work to fruition. For he is not building barns, he is growing new life.

So too with us. We gather together here out of our need as much and sometimes more than out of our prosperity. Its when we feel on the outs that we need God most of all. And we can build our church, but it is God's spirit who will fill it, and bring it to life. So may we individually and as a community have the faith of a mustard seed, doing what we can and trusting God to do the rest.