

St Lucas, June 16-17, 2018

Sermon

So I worked at Camp Moval as what we called year-round site staff, for about 7 years before going to seminary. Being on site staff meant I did all manner of work there. And one job that surfaced in multiple ways over the years was trying to get rid of the mimosa trees that were growing on the dam. We cut them down, we sprayed them with stump killer, we burned them. The last time I was out there I made a point to look, and care to guess what is still growing wild and free on the dam? Nothing we did could hinder their growth and spread. Now, one day I was up working at the pool. On a hill by the pool sits a home that was once the caretaker's house, and there is a large mimosa tree there. While up there I happened to look up at the tree. It was blooming, and absolutely beautiful; stunning pink blossoms bursting off of the palm like leaves. That was enough to bring some joy and wonder into my day, but then I noticed a lot of movement. As I watched I realized that the tree was filled with butterflies, no doubt enjoying the blossoms in their own way. I was struck by the beauty. And all of this is happening on a tree that if we had our way wouldn't be there at all. Mimosas are considered invasive and they shouldn't be there, but here they were, unstoppable, bringing beauty into the world and nourishing life. As I read Jesus' parable using an invasive plant as an image of the Kingdom of God, I couldn't help but remember those mimosas, and it helped me to understand a bit of what he was getting at in these two parables. This is somewhat the point of Jesus speaking in parables; it's his way of trying to explain the unexplainable and spark the imaginations of those listening. Nibs Stroupe explains, "In using these short, provocative stories, Jesus recognizes the importance of the imagination. In using parables Jesus is seeking a shift in our imaginations, a shift in the way we see ourselves, see God, and see others."¹ In this case it's a shift in seeing something that's

¹ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor. Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season after Pentecost 1 (Prophets 3-16) (Feasting on the Word: Year B volume) (Kindle Locations 5152-5153). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

considered a nuisance plant as a sign of the unstoppable reign of God that begins with the smallest of seeds, and though some may want to hinder its growth and remove it, it spreads and grows bringing shelter and nourishment to God's beloved creatures. This, of course, is the parable of the mustard seed, but both parables we heard begin with seeds.

The first equates the Kingdom to a person planting seeds; seed that then grows by the grace of God until it mysteriously springs forth its grain. It begins with someone planting a seed that then becomes a source of nourishment. The planter, then, becomes a partner with God in bringing forth a rich harvest of food; in springing forth a source of life.

The second, again, equates the Kingdom to a tiny mustard seed that is sown, by one way or another, and it grows, stretching its limbs to provide shelter for the birds, birds that also happen to love the seeds that the mustard plant produces, so even they experience a grand feast, and I understand this plant also was known for its medicinal properties. What begins as a tiny, perhaps seemingly worthless seed, becomes an unstoppable, quickly spreading, source of shelter, food, and healing. What this says, is that, perhaps in spite of ourselves at times, God is moving the world toward a time when all are sheltered, fed, and healed, and it all begins with seeds being sown.

Introduction of Michelle

Conversation²

-The parables Jesus shares to describe the Kingdom of God both speak of seeds that are sown by human hands, then they grow to meet the needs of creation, offering food and shelter. This congregation, in partnership with you and the Lindbergh district, has sown some seeds in the

² NOTE: Michelle's responses are colored in blue. These were pre-written responses to the questions, and do not reflect fully what was said during the 'live' version. I encourage you to watch the video if possible to hear the full, very rich, responses.

school district. How have you witnessed those seeds growing and meeting needs in the community?

St. Lucas has provided help to so many of our families in our district, in several different ways. One of the most significant is through the food assistance being offered to our families and students. In our elementary schools, St. Lucas has provided a weekly meal to families in need. We can not underestimate how beneficial it is for a child to have a healthy meal with his or her family. In addition, snacks are provided to those students who do not have snacks at home to bring to school. This is being provided to all our elementary schools, our 2 middle schools, and our high school. I also regularly refer families to your once a month dinner for the community. In addition to food support, St. Lucas has helped in a couple of crisis situations in the past couple of years, when a family was in a situation to have their electricity or gas turned off, St. Lucas provided financial support to prevent the shut-off. Another major way St. Lucas has sown seeds is by supporting our College Kick Start program. We started a new program this year designed to help students in need receive a positive start to their college experience. Students attending a 4 year college received dorm supplies (bedding, towels, hygiene products) and school supplies. Those students attending a local 2 year college received school supplies. Lastly, St. Lucas has helped a local family through assisting with stable housing by renting out the old parsonage house.

In your work as a social worker you often see and hear first-hand the challenges that exist for some of the families and children in our area. What are some of the challenges and issues you are seeing?

- I see such diverse needs. We have students that struggle with behavioral challenges. Often these behavioral issues stem from instability at home - inconsistent parenting, lack of supervision, poor discipline, lack of knowledge of parenting techniques, etc. Other times, these behavioral issues stem from true mental health issues in the child. We also have some parents

that struggle with their own mental health issues or addiction. We have children who struggle because their parents are divorced - inconsistencies between homes and tensions between parents often foster emotional problems for the child. We have single parents that struggle financially. Raising a family on one person's salary is very difficult.

-Any other thoughts or comments you'd like to share?

I just want to thank the St. Lucas community for all the support they have provided to our Lindbergh students and their families.

Conclusion

Based on Michelle's comments, what other seeds can we imagine planting that by God's grace, in cooperation with God's Spirit, will bring the experience of God's Kingdom to the people of our community? After all, we are a congregation with a lot of seeds to sow. Each and every one of you, has something God has shared with you that is looking to be planted in the world to bloom and give life to others. To be clear, I'm not talking about money here, though you may have that gift, and it is of course a gift to be shared as you feel called, but I'm talking about your passions and your skills. Keep in mind that Jesus talked about the tiniest of seeds being the beginning of the Kingdom. Now, you may think whatever you have in your possession is too small, that it's inadequate, that it's not worth sharing, and I am telling you that is simply not true. Each and every one of you has been endowed by your Creator with gifts that, when given in partnership with God for the purposes of bringing the experience of the Kingdom into being, are unstoppably life-giving to the world in ways we can scarcely imagine. Every gift has the possibility of making a difference in the lives of our neighbors. For instance, we have a member who is quite wise when it comes to finances, so he is meeting monthly with our new neighbors in the parsonage to impart his wisdom to them so they know how to manage their finances more efficiently. The sharing of that gift will no doubt change their lives forever. I wonder what it would look like to offer a financial management program to the community to share that knowledge more widely. I

wonder what it would look like to find a way to help address the mental health needs of our community, and be a place where those who are experiencing mental health issues can come as they are and be embraced without stigma to know they are loved and supported. I wonder what ways we might be able to support the parents of children who have mental health issues. I wonder if there is a way to impart life and parenting skills to those who may need some guidance. But that's just me. Where does your imagination go? Ponder that. If you have an idea for something we might be able to do as a church, come talk to me, give me a call, or shoot me an email and we'll see what we can do. Again, do not for one second believe it's too small a thing. I give a speech at every show I play saying that every act no matter how big or small that is rooted in love seeking justice and peace is a ray of God's new dawn breaking forth: today maybe we consider them shoots of God's Kingdom springing to life. I truly believe the possibilities are endless for you all as individuals and for us as a community. As Jesus points out, even the tiniest seed can take root and grow into something that spreads like wild fire, bringing shelter, food, healing; bringing life by the loving hand of God. Again, Jesus shares parables to expand our imaginations and shift our dreaming. May it be so.