

Summerland United Church
June 16th
Tending the New Creation: Planting with Care

Threshold Every little thing we do with compassion is a small seed that can sprout into good things beyond our imagining. Like “paying it forward” or “random acts of kindness,” we can tend a new creation with a small droplet that ripples out in ever-larger circles of caring relationships. Can you think of small acts of compassion that changed your life? God is working through others and through you!

Scripture: Mark 4: 26-34

Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth metaphor or story, listen for the meaning they hold for you on this day. A Reading from the Book of Mark 4: 26-34

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

³⁰ He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

“What’s a good image for God’s kingdom? What parable can I use to explain it? Consider a mustard seed. When scattered on the ground, it’s the smallest of all the seeds on the earth; but when it’s planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all vegetable plants. It produces such large branches that the birds in the sky are able to nest in its shade.”

One: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

All: Thanks be to God.

Selection from the Song of Faith: *See Insert*

Anne: This statement of faith seeks to provide a verbal picture of what The United Church of Canada understands its faith to be in its current historical, political, social, and theological context at the beginning of the 21st century.

This is not a statement for all time but for our time. And in as much as the Spirit is vast and wild, we recognize that our understanding of the Holy is always partial and limited. Nonetheless we have faith, and this statement collects the meaning of our song.

So God creates the universe

and with it the possibility of being and relating.
 God tends the universe,
 mending the broken and reconciling the estranged.

God enlivens the universe,
 guiding all things toward harmony with their Source. Pg. 3

Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator,
 who is both in creation and beyond it.

All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related.

All creation is good.

We sing of the Creator,
 who made humans to live and move
 and have their being in God.

In and with God,
 we can direct our lives toward right relationship
 with each other and with God.

We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.

We can grow in wisdom and compassion.

We can recognize all people as kin.

We can accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse,
 but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter.

Reflection: Planting with Care

The first lines of the Song of Faith we heard this morning, is referred to as the refrain. *“So God creates the universe*

and with it the possibility of being and relating.

God tends the universe,

mending the broken and reconciling the estranged.

God enlivens the universe,

guiding all things toward harmony with their Source”

A refrain, those of you with musical knowledge know, is a regularly recurring phrase or verse especially at the end of each stanza or division of a poem or song. Refrains are important in songs because they reinforce key ideas or themes of the song. Although this refrain in the Song of Faith, doesn't repeat in the printed text, because it's called the refrain, one can imagine that as we read the song, we might, in our minds return to this refrain and consider the other verses in relationship to these phrases.

The thing that gets me, right in the heart, in this refrain is the expansiveness, the vastness of a huge swirling cosmos. These lines bring to mind, for me, images of nebula, galaxies and a feeling of immensity. Immensity so colossal its astounding and I am overcome and bewildered by the size and grandeur of it all.

It makes me feel pretty small and insignificant against this backdrop of the entire universe. So then we look at the parable for today – a story about the mustard seed, referred to as the tiniest of seeds, perhaps the most insignificant of seeds. And Creator pays close attention to it. So much so that it grows into the greatest of trees where birds can take shelter among the branches.

The song of faith says, *“Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator who is both in creation and beyond it. All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related.”*

So what does the mustard seed say about Creator? Mustard seeds, by the way, are not the smallest of seeds, there are plenty of other seeds that are much smaller and mustard plants do not grow into the largest of bushes or trees for birds to take shelter in.

This is twist of parables. The reason they can be hard to get into and we need to turn them around to open them up.

What mustard is, is a tenacious, determined weedy plant that gets everywhere. It grows in good soil, bad soil, rocky soil, anywhere you scatter mustard seeds it will grow. Our theme for today is ‘planting with care’ but mustard seeds don’t need any care at all to grow. They will grow whether you want them to or not.

And that’s what the Kingdom of God is like? Not to shabby an idea huh? For the people who originally heard this parable the idea that the kingdom of God was like a scraggly annoying weed would have been shocking. They were used to the concepts of Kingdoms being build from the Cedars of Lebanon. Enormous towering, immense and strong trees. A metaphor for a towering, immense and strong kingdom.

Yet, here we are being told that this kingdom, this way of living in the world is weedy, wastrel nothing plant. But unlike a Cedar of Lebanon it spreads fast, it grows fast, it can get into the tiniest places and grow bright beautiful colours. And while it might not grow tall enough for birds to find shelter in, their seeds feed birds and give places for ground birds to retreat into.

All parts of creation, animate and inanimate are related, says our song of faith. If this is true then we scatter the mustard seeds of our faith and plant all the things named in the song: *we can direct our lives toward right relationship, with each other and with God. We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life. We can grow in wisdom and*

compassion. We can recognize all people as kin. We can accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse, but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter.

These little seeds may not change the whole world with a vastness and immensity of a cedar of Lebanon, but they might just change one persons world for the good. And that, no matter how insignificant that might feel is powerful. When seeds are scattered they grow producing more seeds which multiple and multiple and multiple... rippling out into the world, getting into all the waysides, and rough ground. Falling into the cracks and growing up something beautiful. These small moments and these small movements create change in the world, down all the strands of the web of life, in ways we may never see and can only imagine.