

June 13, 2021

Sermon for Every Sunday

The father of the groom was crying. He was standing in the corner of the Church, watching his son and the wedding party pray together just before the wedding rehearsal started.

His son – the groom - had gathered the wedding party around the baptismal font. Then the groom started to pray. He thanked God for the gift of his bride, and prayed that he would be a generous husband. He also asked God to make him a faith-filled father, so that he could effectively introduce his children to Jesus once they were born.

The groom's father was in the corner, crying. I walked over to him, and dad simply pointed to his son and said, "I am so proud of him. He grew up to be a man of faith. He loves his fiancée, he loves the Lord and the church. Look at him, leading his friends in prayer. Where did he learn to do all this?"

And without hesitation, I said, "He learned it by watching you."

What dad did not know was this: during my meetings with this bride and groom, the groom told me that his dad was his hero. He said that many of the most important things he had learned in life, he learned by watching his dad.

He watched his dad kneeling by his bed in prayer every night. He watched his dad receiving communion every Sunday. He watched his dad, leading the family in prayer before every meal, even when they were out to dinner. He watched his dad, feeding the hungry with his men's bible study group.

He watched his dad working hard every day, but making time for his family every night.

And most of all, he watched his dad being a husband. He saw that his dad rarely spoke harshly to his wife. How he and his wife worked together, raising the children, getting through the hard times, laughing in the good times, and creating a home where love and faith were valued above any material possession.

The son told me all of this during the marriage preparation meetings. So when dad said to me, "where did he learn all this? How did he become such a good person?" I had the privilege of saying, "He learned it from you...from your daily example of being a good Christian, a good husband, a good father." And after the wedding, I said to myself, that dad was planting good seeds, and he didn't even know it. He was planting seeds in the life of his son, and he was amazed at how they had taken root, and blossomed to an amazing harvest.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus tells parables about the kingdom of God. IN Chapter 4, Jesus gives us an image that is meant to draw us in to a mystery. This parable presents an invitation for us to participate in the growth and spread of God's kingdom – yes, we are called to be hard-working seed planters, but we are also called to be humble, grateful growth-watchers!

'The kingdom of God,' Jesus says, 'is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground.'" So far,

this is a description of a farmer doing what a farmer should do! Scattering the seed. Doing the planting!

But once the farmer has done his or her part, Jesus tells us that *something happens*. Time passes, the sun shines, the rain falls, and the seed begins to grow. The plant sprouts and grows stronger, and finally the harvest comes. And all this growth occurs, Jesus says, without the farmer truly understanding HOW it happens.

If you asked the farmer in the parable – ‘how did these plants grow? How did this great harvest happen?’ The farmer would honestly answer: ‘I don’t know how.’

I recall what that dad at the church said: ‘I don’t know how my son learned all this.’ I knew at least part of the answer. His son learned so much because the father did what he was supposed to do. His dad was faithful, and loving, and good... and that became the seed which flourished in the harvest of his son’s goodness.

In all of this, we must stand humbly before the mystery of each other’s lives. We probably all know children who reflect the goodness and faith of their parents. The parents sew good seeds, they give a good example, they teach their children faith, and that seed takes root. Somehow. And flourishes. Often.

Often, but not always. Most of us also know parents who planted great seed, gave a great example, did everything right as parents... and the harvest is a bit different. “Such a good family life when he was young – how did he make such troubling choices when he grew up?” All the other children in the family turned out well, how did that one end up going down such a difficult road?

The seed planting is our task – the growing happens in a way that is mysterious to us... beyond our full knowledge, certainly beyond our control.

That same mystery, Jesus says, surround the growth of the Kingdom of God. We must humbly confess that we will never know how the kingdom grows, how it spreads, in whom it will take root – because it is not our kingdom, it is God’s. God is in charge.

Christ reveals the truth. The Spirit leads us day by day. The Lord can take our smallest act of kindness or faithfulness, use it as a seed, and multiply it beyond our imagining. God can act through one person, and transform nations. God can act through one church, and change thousands of lives. And in the end – we don’t know how God does it.

But on the other hand – we *do* know how God works – or, at least, how God’s work gets started. We *do* know that Christ’s Spirit changes lives. It happens when the Spirit inspires one person to live a life focused on what is truly important.

- + Like when a son is able to watch his father being prayerful, faithful and good.
- + Like when a daughter is able to watch her mother being strong, loving and wise.
- + Like when a neighbor is able to watch another neighbor doing the just and Godly thing. The

seed of the kingdom is sewn when God's grace enables someone to say – "I am going to *do* what is right, and *say* what is right, and stand for what is right." Others will watch. Others will learn. The seed is thus planted. God does the rest, and others grow into the kingdom.

This weekend we also hear from St. Paul, who says: "We make it our aim to please God. For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil."

Now, scholars and theologians may debate precisely what Saint Paul meant when we wrote this, but what this passage says to me is this:

My actions mean something. Our actions have consequences, now, and in eternity.

If we understand that, then we also begin to understand which things are worth doing, things that give honor and glory to God. And I suspect that if we try to live like that, with the help of God, then others may watch, and others will learn. Good seed will be planted.

Then, before you know it, we are not alone in living the values of the Kingdom of God. More folks will have learned how to say 'yes' to life, and 'no' to violence. How to say 'yes' to justice, and 'no' to greed. How to say 'yes' to caring for others, and 'no' to self-centered living. How to say 'yes' to patience, 'yes' to forgiveness, 'yes' to faithfulness, 'yes' to truth, 'yes' to Christ.

IN my life, there have been so many wonderful people who have helped to plant the seed of the kingdom in me. This weekend, I thank God for them. I thank God that their faithfulness and generosity became one of the ways that the Divine seed-sower planted some truth in me. And I marvel at how God has helped that truth to grow. I don't know how God does it. But it is God's kingdom, and God's mystery.

As I thank God for the people who planted the seed of faith in me, I stand in awe of my daily calling – our daily calling as baptized believers. Live the faith. Speak the Word. Do the Gospel. In other words, plant the seed. Plant the seed of the Kingdom, not just where you think it will grow, but everywhere.

Our privilege is to plant the seed of the kingdom everywhere. And then stand back, on awe of the mystery, of how God makes everything grow.

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