

Eleventh Sunday – June 14, 2015

Why would anyone in the first century have listened to Jesus tell parables, let alone bother to remember his stories? The answer to this question, I suspect, is that Jesus' use of parables teased his audience into recognizing what they had already known, and that they did so by reframing their vision. Parables tapped into their memories, their values, their deepest longings. In the 21st century we might be better off thinking less about what the parables of Jesus mean, and more about what the parables can do: remind, provoke, refine, confront, disturb. If we hear today's gospel parables in their rawness, we might hear not only about the Kingdom of God in heaven, but how to find it on earth.

So what can we say about our two gospel parables for today? First, there's the one about a farmer sowing seed and doing all that's necessary to foster growth. But the seed grows of its own accord, the farmer knows not how, or when. Might not this parable remind us that some things need to be left alone? Keep exposing the seed to air and it will not germinate. Not everything, or even everyone, needs our constant attention. We are part of a larger process, and although we may start an action, once started, it can often do quite well on its own. Second, sometimes we need to get out of the way. We are not always the focus; sometimes we are the facilitator for something bigger than ourselves. Which is another way of saying we are not the center of the universe; rather, God is the center of all that is. So, what do we do to get back to our centeredness in God when we are off-kilter or lost in navel-gazing?

Then we have the parable of the tiny mustard seed. To say that the parable suggests that great outcomes arrive from small beginnings is correct, but it is too easy. To note that mustard is a curative, and one available to all is a better launch point. It is part of the good world God gives us: like the sun which insists on shining, the seed that insists on growing. The invitation to partake is a universal one, as the birds in this parable so neatly demonstrate.

Finally, we may notice that both parables are nicely domestic. The Kingdom of God, therefore, may be found in what we might call our own backyard, in the generosity of nature and in the daily working of men and women. So the challenge of Jesus' parables can be decidedly homey: don't ask when the Kingdom of God comes or where it is. The "When" is in its own good time. The "where" is that it is already present. The kingdom is present when humanity and nature work together, and we do what we're put here to do – to go out on a limb to provide for others and ourselves as well.