

June 21 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32

Ezekiel 17:22-24

Mark 4:26-34

Sermon *God's Part and Our Part*

Well, for those of you who have spotted where the Pastor lives in his new house at this point? If you have driven by the new spot on State Street lately you will notice I haven't gotten around to planting one single bedding plant in front of my house. Unlike what I used to do when I was in a Junior Hi kid and I was really into gardening. Under the tutelage of one of my grandmother's very best friends, her name was Mrs. Ida Cline, in fact she would be appalled that I am so far behind in my gardening project this spring because even far into her 80s she had a huge vegetable patch, berry bushes and fruit trees and flowers of every sort and variety. And most of what I learned about how to appreciate plants and how to care for those plants was due to Mrs. Cline's teaching and Mrs. Cline's love. Now Mrs. Cline's house was almost like a green house when you went inside. When I visited her small home as a boy, I found her sunny hot front room literally bursting forth with blooming plants. Mrs. Cline, I bet you, had at least 50 different flowering plants of all different types in pots sitting in the sunlight on shelves in that front room. The plants that impressed me most were two attractive geraniums which had grown well beyond their ordinary size in what you would expect geranium to grow. One was almost four feet tall and the other was nearly five feet tall, almost taller than I was at that time. In fact Mrs. Cline was so proud of those geraniums that she had been tending carefully for many, many years feeding, and watering them, and tying them to the tall stakes to provide them with their necessary support and their healthy leaves and their bright red blossoms showed the gardener's dedication and care given to them.

It was quite a contrast between Mrs. Cline's prize geraniums and the plant that we hear about in today's gospel lesson from Mark's Gospel. Our parable tells about the lonely grain of mustard seed which the Bible calls the smallest seeds of all the seeds upon the earth. For all intents and purposes this small seed is worthless, it is tiny and it is dry, humanely no value to the farmer in the parable, who, in fact who intends to plant it and others like it in the field. And yet when that little seed is planted, watered and is nourished, which I believe is our part of the bargain, we are told that it grows up and it becomes the greatest and tallest of all the shrubs and puts forth branches so large that according to the parable, that birds can make nests in their shade, which I think, is God's part in the bargain.

Now whether or not the Biblical writer was exaggerating a little bit is not the point because there are scientists that tell us that there are smaller seeds in the world than the mustard seed. The idea here is that something seemingly without value and of no use has tremendous growth potential once God gets a hold of it, if it is planted, if it is cared for by faithful followers of Jesus. And one question that we have to ask ourselves is, as people of faith, in the midst of the ideas in this parable are this. Which of these plants would be appropriate symbol of our personal journey of faith? As a disciple of Jesus are you more like those flourishing geraniums or are you more like the mustard seed? Barren right now, but

waiting for new life, waiting for new growth in your life. Another way to look at it is by remembering that God's vision for each one of us is that we should bloom like those giant geraniums, thriving on God's promises and bringing forth the fruits of the Gospel and bearing fruit as Christians showing the evidence of God's Good News in our lives.

So we begin by being deeply rooted in God's gift of love, in God's gift of forgiveness in each one of us; Jesus has died and Jesus is risen again to give us his love, to give us new life, and this is our true and constant source of strength every day that we live. This gift of love begins to bear fruit in our lives if we allow Jesus power to make a difference in the way that we live our lives day by day in the world around us.

Now I have to tell us that changes don't come over night, we slowly find ourselves growing in our confidence toward God. We find that we want to learn more about Jesus' teachings or read the Bible or to pray for the needs of our selves and for others in the world around us. We may begin to open our eyes for the first time in our whole lives to the needs and injustices around us and we may begin to gain the courage to speak up for those who cannot defend themselves or to act upon any of those needs that we might discover. This is only just a few of the ways God's good news can be expressed in the midst of our lives of faith. Bearing fruit for God does not necessarily involve some spectacular ministry, but it does involve our struggle to remain faithful to God over the course of time and it does require us to be willing to respond to God's call and claim on our time and on our lives which is again our part of the bargain.

I am going to suggest something that maybe we should use the giant geraniums as a symbol of what our lives can be to bring each of us bloom in our individual lives of faith. Even as we recognize this idea, we also realize that it isn't easy to bloom as Jesus disciples, sometimes it seem more appropriate to compare our lives like that to the barren mustard seed that I spoke of earlier. You know, we are plagued by doubts and God's presence may not be such a sure thing for us on a day by day basis when we are wrestling with our own troubles. It may seem impossible to reach out to others in the midst of that time of trouble. We are all too aware of the things that each of us has left done in serving God and the world around us. And we know that God has every single right to be frustrated with us much as the farmer may be frustrated with that tiny seed of mustard, but the good word for us is that God's frustration, if it does exist, far outweighed by God's eternal love, by, and by God's eternal patience to each one of us.

Like that farmer, God holds on to the hope that we can and we will bear the fruits of faith, God has loved us once and for all in Jesus. God continues to care for us giving us opportunity to every day to grow and to flourish. God knows that even a seemingly empty life can bring forth beautiful acts of service, even as a barren seed has the potential to blossom for God's glory. So God bears with us just as the farmer bears with the mustard seed or as my friend Mrs. Cline with those very tall, with those very fruitful geraniums. God nurtures us with Holy Spirit and encourages our life by the promises of Jesus. God tends us carefully. God tends us lovingly. God tends us patiently. There's that plaque that I shared with you a little bit earlier with the kids. "Bloom Where You Are Planted." I believe that is God's challenge to us during the course of our lives.

It is so, so easy to fall into the trap on concentrating on the negatives in our situation that we don't see the blessings that God gives every day. So I encourage you to look at the situation in which God has planted each one of us. Let's take deep root into the Gospel and draw from the life promises of Jesus and let Jesus to allow us the life which we need to find express in us every day. If it's God's will that we should bloom in Jesus where we are planted so we may prosper in faithfulness and God's kingdom might flourish in our midst. Now God always does God's part in this process. The question I leave with you this morning is-- have we done our part? Have we done our part? And together we say AMEN.