

## **The kingdom of God is like an invasive plant???**

The Rev. Mark D. Wilkinson, Rector  
St. Aidan's Episcopal Church  
Virginia Beach VA 23452  
June 17, 2018  
Mark4:26-34

Over the past several weeks we have been hearing the story of Samuel from the Hebrew Scriptures. Some of you wonder what that has to do with our gospel passages from Mark? Over the next few months we will hear a series of stories from the Hebrew Scriptures.

The lectionary gives me the choice at the beginning of the season after Pentecost to select Track 1 or Track 2. The track 2 readings are tied to the Gospel passage. The Track 1 tells a continuous story from the Hebrew Scriptures. The problem for me with track 2 is that the great stories of the Hebrew Scriptures are chopped up and scattered throughout the year and we do not get to hear them in context. Track 1 tells a complete story, so for example we have heard 3 weeks of the story of Samuel and will hear more as we move on through June. However they do not always relate to the Gospel passage.

Now it so happens that I believe that the story of Samuel does in fact relate to our gospel story this week. Mark is telling us that the kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seed that sprouts. He doesn't know how but when it is ready he gathers in the harvest. Then it is Mark's version of the parable of the Mustard Seed. The mustard seed was a well known metaphor of the time for something very tiny and seemingly insignificant, but there is more here than meets the eye. Depending on which version you read, Matthew, Mark or Luke it grows into anything from a large bush to a tree. The focus is on something great coming from something small as well as unexpected. For this parable contains a true surprise that most people do not know about. Now hold onto that thought.

This is a theme in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. God is constantly taking something small or insignificant and causing great things to happen. Look at Samuel himself! Given over to Eli as a young child to be raised as a priest in the temple. Son of Hannah a relatively insignificant person at the time but as the mother of Samuel she is revered. This little boy at a young age is called by God to replace Eli even though Eli has grown sons who by right should have replaced him. Yet they are not worthy.

Now Samuel is being called to anoint the king who will replace Saul. Saul who was everything Samuel warned the people of Israel about but they demanded a king so they can be like other nations and go to war. That was in last week's passage by the way. Now it is time of a new king. Samuel has all of the sons of Jesse brought before him. Samuel thinks several times, well this looks like a good candidate, but God says no not this one. Finally he asks if all of Jesse's sons have been brought before him. He is told well there is David the youngest, but he is out caring for the sheep. Surely this isn't the

one, but when he appears before Samuel God makes it very clear that this indeed is the future king. The youngest of all, the one to whom nobody was paying any attention. David who next week will slay Goliath and eventually become one of the greatest kings in the history of Israel

You see God often, in fact almost always works in unexpected ways in our lives, in ways we often don't see until looking back. Jesus' parable of the mustard seed would have been a shock to those who heard it. This particular mustard plant is a type of black mustard plant that grew along the banks of the Jordan River and that in all honesty was a giant weed! It was very hard to control, think in terms of kudzu or English ivy. Yes it grew very tall often to 7 or 8 feet but it was the last thing that any respectable farmer would plant. In fact an established farmer feared it because it was so invasive. Now the Cedars of Lebanon as a symbol of Syria or Judah, that makes sense but the kingdom of God is an invasive shrub, what was that about?

This is Jesus' message that kingdom of God does not play by our rules. It is however something that covers everything and spreads quickly. It thrives regardless of attempts to contain or restrict its growth. God's ways of being in the world will upset society's ways of perceiving things, it will break down human created boundaries and divisions as it spreads over humanity's prejudices and society's values. It will resist human efforts to eradicate it and change the landscape. Even when people attempt to burn it and bring back their old fields, their old ways of doing things, God's kingdom, like the mustard plant will continue to sprout and disrupt the old order.

Jesus' message seeks to disrupt those in power especially when they trample others, those that seek to dismiss the dignity of every human being. Jesus' message seeks to break down barriers not raise them up. Jesus' message seeks to move our hearts towards others especially the last and least. Jesus calls for a world where every person is cared for, valued and loved. No person is considered disposable for whatever reason.

Look at the early church, Mark's community in particular. Yes there were some folks of means, but it was men and women, let's not forget how radical including women was for his time. In Christ as Paul says, there is neither man nor woman, slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, but all were of equal value, all were equally loved and valued. Remember that Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love you God with all your heart and all your mind and all your strength and the second is like unto it, love your neighbor as yourself on these two laws hang all the prophets. Paul also quotes this in his letter to the Romans.

God constantly chooses what seems foolish by the world's standards to bring forth new life. He chose Samuel as a great prophet. He chose the young David to be a great king, he sent Jesus the child of a poor couple from the backwater of Galilee to be our savior. Jesus chose poor uneducated fishermen, tax collectors and other undesirables to be his first disciples. In today's world I look at Wendy's church Good Samaritan who almost everyone in the diocese and many of their members had given up on, to launch several new partnerships and ministries. This is a modern mustard seed and there is no reason

we at St. Aidan's cannot prove to be another mustard seed in our neighborhood. There is no reason we cannot be fruitful and it is towards that end that we have embarked on our mission and vision work. To nurture that seed, to be that church that defies the obstacles that the world puts in our ways in order to grow spread God's message of love for all people.

Pastor Steve Garnaas-Holmes wrote in his blog, *Unfolding Light* this week:

You are a tiny speck of God's infinite love.  
When you let yourself be sown into this world,  
given to low places,  
what seems tiny unfolds,  
miraculously multiplied because it is God,  
and becomes great, a cedar of Lebanon,  
a mighty oak of love, a safe refuge for the weary,  
a source of life and comfort for the meek,  
a welcome home for God's little ones.  
We only see the seed, but the unfolding awaits.<sup>1</sup>

I pray God to grant us all the wisdom and grace to allow you to sow our seed in this world and help us to see what you are unfolding in our midst.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unfoldinglight.net/reflections/my9ayd2jg2eehml4a3t8gez7e2pc4x>