

Pentecost 3-B
6/13/21 CTK

Mark 4:26-34; 1 Ezekiel 17:22-24

Back in about 2nd grade one day the teacher came to class with a bag dried beans, some dirt and some little plastic pots. She said we were going to grow beans.

I knew about growing things, because my mom had let me to grow radishes in the garden we had behind our apartment building. She showed me how to put the seeds in the ground, cover it up, and water each little row. Sure enough after a week or so little green leaves started to poke up out of the ground. After a few more weeks she told me it was time to start picking them – bring in the harvest you might say. When I pulled on the little green bunches of the leaves, at the end of it was a bright little ball of red with a spindly little tail attached to it like a little mouse tail. And when I wiped it off and took a bite out of it, it was crunchy and white as snow, a little bit spicy hot. With a little salt those radishes were delicious! And they came from those little seeds. Hmm, I thought.

But with the beans were really strange and wonderful. We were taught first to soak a paper towel in water and then fold our bean inside the wet paper towel. We all set our little packets up on the window sill in a saucer and waited. All we had to do was just to keep the paper towel wet. And wouldn't you know it, after a week or so, when we came to school and looked on the window sill, some of the beans had started sprouting their own little tails. So each of us had to take our little plastic pot, fill it up with dirt and make a hole with our finger and put the bean in, cover it up. Then we'd give it a little water and set them back up on the window sill in its saucer. Pretty soon, another week or so, and some of the little pots had a little curvy green stalk sticking out of it. And soon the little green arch got bigger until one morning we came into the room and a miracle had happened! Some of the kids' bean stocks had grown up out of the dirt until one end of the arch had been pulled up out of the earth, and hanging on the end of that skinny little stalk was the bean we had planted! It had flipped itself upside down and was standing on its head. We screamed in delight when we saw that happen. It was a miracle. A wonder. The teacher just smiled.

And then we moved on to the next miracle. Even in my day, by the time we got to second grade even our young sense of wonder had a very short life span. Because the hits just kept coming. The very first time we ever saw rain, or felt the drops on our face when we were just babies - water falling out of the sky! I imagine it was

pretty stunning, but then, we might have been distracted by seeing a cardinal fly by for the first time – wow! And then noticed that the sun was in a different place in the sky than it was before. So, already we had to get used to the miracles that were all around us. And as we grew, just got too busy and saturated with wonder even to take much time for each of these miracles because there always another one coming down the pike.

I was talking about this with someone recently and she told me a story about the first time some of the grandchildren saw the ocean. They had run ahead and come over a sand dune, saw the endless blue expanse, infinite, white caps and heard the roar of the waves crashing on the shore and they said “whoa!” When their mom caught up with them and they asked her – “did you know about this?” Yeah, she knew about this. But I guess it had been a while since she had been completely blown away by it the way the kids were when they saw it for the first time. We grow up, and get busy and sometimes stop wondering at the miracles altogether. The ocean, the night sky, the forest, the harvest.

We can even take something those things for granted and lose a sense of wonder over it completely. The trouble is, if we take it too much for granted we are going to lose not just a sense of wonder but the ocean and the forest.

Today Jesus compares the miracle of the growth of a seed to the Kingdom of God. Maybe to help his disciples recover their sense of wonder.

He tells a couple of little stories, parables.

In the first parable, a harvest is planted by someone, Jesus says, I guess it doesn't really matter who it is. And as the days passed the nights passed and just like my little radishes and beans, the crop grew until it was time for the harvest, which the “someone” brings in. But the “someone,” Jesus says, did not know how it happened, any more than we do.. Oh, science can give us the technical explanation of how the sun's heat warms the earth, the sun's light works with the chemicals in the leaves to create nutrients proteins. But to find where that spark of life came from when the earth warmed and the water touched the seed we have to go back much further. We would have to go back through the very beginning of plant life on our planet to find that spark, and even deeper, into the depths of space and the centers of the black holes where stars die and are born and back further in time to the very genesis of all matter and energy, - the big bang. The first day of creation. God said “Let there be light.” And still, nobody really knows how that happened

except God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who were there. At some point we realize it's a wonder, it's just a miracle. Because this is the Kingdom of God.

The tiny mustard seed, like the grain of wheat Jesus talks about elsewhere which falls into the earth and dies so that it can bear much fruit, ends up a big shrub which provides shade for the birds and spice for the hot dogs and hamburgers of Jesus' day. Lamb-kebobs. How does this happen? It's a miracle.

It's the Kingdom of God which surrounds us and is among us and in us, and which it's easy to miss.

And we are part of that Kingdom, that miracle that is so wonderful. The someone who sowed the seed didn't have to do much, but did have to sow and cultivate and irrigate and weed maybe. The second graders had to plant and soak the paper towel. We don't have much to do: we just have to not kill the oceans and to take care of the forests; Jesus does call us to be part of this miraculous Kingdom. But we don't have to do much compared to what God does. Just be a part of it. God does all the rest.

The seed falls into the earth and dies and then brings forth fruit. God gives the growth.