June 17, 2010 What Will This Seed Produce?

Mark 4:26-34

 Are you a dog person? My first dog was a black and white Springer Spaniel, a gift from my parents for my third birthday. She was my protector and devoted companion. When I was about six years old, Mom felt it necessary to discipline me with a spanking. Unfortunately she broke a blood vessel in her hand on the rivet on my jeans pocket *and* Suzie came to my rescue to bite her. From that point on Mom felt there had to be a better way to discipline. Suzie was a good dog. She bore several litters of puppies, all fine examples of obedience and devotion, just like their mother. Her teats never to shape after her last litter causing them to swing to and fro as she walked. She died of breast cancer.

 Suzie II was given to me early in our marriage, again as a gift from my parents. She was also a black and white Springer Spaniel. She was named after her predecessor in hopes she would live up to the legacy of my childhood friend: faithful, true, gentle and protective - pretty great expectations for a puppy. She did grow up to meet those expectations and so much more. She even paddled out to the deep water to attempt a rescue of my then six year old daughter who suddenly discovered she was in water over her head.

 In much the same way we place great expectations on our children. Each infant seems to come with a vision, an expectation of who or what they will become. Sons may look just like their fathers. Daughters may be spitting images of their mothers. But all children, from infancy to old age, should never be limited by our human expectations. We do learn certain talents or interests from our parents and families, but God has ordained each of us to be unique creations of our own. The challenge is to discover who we are! We need to discover who we are independent of our parents, family and community.

 God’s perceptions are not limited to surface realities. We see with eyes attuned to this present life. God sees from the perspective of eternity. God understands and comprehends the future from the position of divine timelessness.

 Marks’ gospel lessons speak of this divine timeless perspective. Two kingdom parables are told, in both cases about seeds. Jesus says growth is steady and sure, often going unnoticed. No one can explain how a seed bursts forth to life. There are seeds that were buried in the pyramids that can still be planted and grown. In the same way the reign of God grows in a steady and sure manner. Kingdom growth is inevitable and comes with the expectation of our participation in God’s rule.

 God sees the possibilities of beauty even in what we might consider ugly. God glances at the mustard seed, a weed in its day, fit only to be discouraged or discarded, and sees not a dry brown, lifeless shell, but a potential shrub. Jesus calls it “the greatest of all”. God sees beneath the surface of things to the inner reality that lies buried. God sees beneath the surface to uncover that which might become great given time, care, love and grace.

Jesus lets each listener make the Good News his or her own story. Taken within the whole of humanity of faith, our personal stories of God’s work and witness in our lives creates a living gospel letter, a living witnesses to the grace, peace and joy of God through Christ.

The church has over 2,000 years’ worth of living testimonies to God’s power. We are alive in Christ; seeds ready to produce fruit that multiplies and feeds the world with love and grace. Each one of us, with our unique giftedness, shares in telling the story of God’s love for us.

For example: the gospel of God’s love according to Martin Luther, to John Wesley, to David Gladstone, to Bob Kern, Jean Holland, Vicki, Christian, even to little Evangeline. It is the gospel according to the nurse at the doctor’s office, or the cashier at the bank, or the counsel for at camp when you were a kid. *Every* person has an impact on our lives. Is that impact a positive one filled with God’s redeeming love multiplying its effect on a hurting world, or a self-serving influence that simply brings the individual recognition?

How have the parables been reenacted in your life? There is the parable of the stressed out boss and the Christian co-worker. Another parable is the child who will not clean his or her room and the patient parent who teaches the child consequences. There is the parable of the new suit and the flat tire. One parable in the news of late is of parents and family being warned about K-2 by parents who have “been there”. If we allow ourselves time to reflect there are hundreds of seed parables planted in hope for a lost world.

*Not all parables will make it to print, nor should they. God’s work is constant and never ending. The power of the parable is in its ability to help us understand God’s continual work in creation and salvation history. We have within us the power of our own personal story and the power of God to make changes, to grow from our life experiences and share how the growth has made us healthier in body, mind and spirit.*

Michele Halseide wrote an article in the May/June 1991 issue of “Today’s Christian Women”. As she was sorting through some old boxes she came across a dance costume she wore in high school. She was surprised to find waves of pain rushing in on her. She remembered the night. It wasn’t the Hollywood Bowl before thousands of people, but no less important to her. It wasn’t pride she was remembering. She wrote, it was “squinting beyond the spotlights, peering into the audience in search of one face – my father’s.” Had he kept his promise? Was he really there? He had said on the phone that day, “I’ll be there. I wouldn’t miss it.” But he did. He never showed. He never said the words she longed to hear, “I’m proud of you Michele.”

One costume. One memory. Had this experience and others like it tinted her concept of a heavenly Father as well? Yes. Unintentionally no doubt, but we are living parables, earthly examples of heavenly truths. Yet growing up under the wing of a near perfect father does not guarantee a perfect understanding of heavenly truths. As one adult shared in a Bible study, “My dad was so affirming it took me years to recognize God disciplines as well as loves.”

 The power of seeds is awesome. A countess in Germany was said to be so closed and turned in on herself that her burial instructions were to have her tombstone be of such great weight and bound to tightly to the earth with iron bands that it never could be moved. Following her death, her wish was granted.

 But a seed found its way between the monumental stones. It found just enough soil to begin to put down roots and grow bit by bit until one day the stones were pushed apart by the force of the plants growth. The iron bands burst as it they were but threads; so much for human efforts to barricade ourselves against the seed of the Spirit. Even if we are hardened against God, the seed of love can find its way even in the most hardened surface of soil.

 I’m going to quit talking now. It’s said a picture is worth a thousand words. My son is an Eagle Scout and active leader. His father was not the best role model for him, but because of it he has helped bring out the best for many a parent and leader. He created something I think says more about the power of a seed than anything I can put into words. There are three parts to this slide show. We will view only the first part…Happy Father’s Day.