

Planting Seeds

1 Samuel 15:34—16:13
Mark 4:26-34

Crossroads Christian Church
June 14, 2015 Pentecost 3 B

First of all, let me thank you all for being here on this special day for Sandy and me. Each of you, members of Crossroads, members of other congregations we have served, family and friends, have a special place in our hearts, and we are so grateful for your presence. And we want to thank the members of Crossroads who have been working so hard on today's celebration. Just to let you know, when we had our wedding ceremony fifty years ago next Friday, we used hymns and had congregational singing for the processional *Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee* and recessional, *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*, so that's why we're singing them today.

One of the things that I love about being an interim pastor is all the wonderful people we meet, in so many different settings. Another thing that I love is that each congregation has its own way of doing things, so I can get ideas at one church that I can carry over to the next church. In a way, it's like planting seeds—and that just happens to be the topic of today's sermon.

Planting seeds. When our Dare to Lead team met two weeks ago, we got excited about the possibility of using some of the ground around the church for a community garden. We're just at the stage of making preliminary inquiries, but it offers some fascinating possibilities for reaching out to the community. Two churches that I've served previously have had gardens.

Planting seeds. We have friends who are with us today, Norm and Judi Linville. Norm's a retired Disciples minister who grew up on a farm in Kansas, who have 2 spots in a community garden in Normandy, a couple of miles from their home. They've enjoyed working the garden, growing food. As part of having space in the community garden, they help maintain a section of the garden that grows produce that's given away in a local food bank. They're planting seeds.

Planting seeds--of course, farmers invest large amounts of money, time, and work to prepare the soil, put in crops, and keep them cultivated, not knowing what the vagaries of weather and market prices will bring. They stake their livelihoods on planting seeds. One farmer plants seeds and grows crops on our Swansea land, which is good stewardship.

Planting seeds—it's a symbol of hope and trust, it's a symbol of believing that there's a future worth preparing for, it's a symbol of God's way of bringing life and newness and change into the world—slowly and subtly, in ways that can't even be seen, until a sprout of something new breaks the earth, reaching toward the sun.

Our scripture texts show how God brings change and newness into the world, in what we might call "underground" ways, like planting seeds. First

we heard the story of Samuel and David—where God grows a future for a stagnant, fearful nation.

A few years earlier, Samuel, the last Judge of Israel, had finally given into the people's desire to have a king, so as to be competitive with the other nations around them. So Samuel himself had chosen Saul, a natural leader—tall, handsome, strong, and brave. But things didn't work out. Saul was insecure in his role, and never learned to trust God. Time after time, Saul would make the wrong choices. Finally, God and Samuel both grieved about Saul—both out of pity and frustration. Today we'd call it the Peter Principal—Saul had risen past the level of his competence. Saul wasn't up to the job, but he was desperate to keep it. So God called Samuel to choose, to anoint, another king.

Samuel the kingmaker was to become Samuel the king breaker, but the present king didn't want to be broken. Samuel was aware that this was a tricky business. It smelled a lot like treachery, like treason, even. But to follow God's orders, he had to put his own personal safety and the safety of others on the line. So he took a risk, he did a subversive act to allow God's will to be planted that would eventually grow to fruition.

Look at what he had to overcome to follow God's instructions. He had to put aside his grieving for Saul and guilt for his part of the process. He had to overcome his fear that anointing another king while Saul still held the office would be seen as an act of treason. He had to put aside his own preconceptions of what it took to be a king. God said it was to be a son of Jesse. "It must be Jesse's oldest son," he'd say. "No," God would reply. "Keep looking." "Well, it must be the next oldest...No, keep looking." Finally came Jesse's youngest son, who was so out of contention that he had stayed behind with the sheep. "Yes," said God. "Anoint this one as king." So the old and creaky prophet and Judge anointed one who was hardly more than a boy to be the king of Israel. Everybody knew that Saul was really the king, for Saul had all the power and authority, and all the armed troops. But Samuel and God and David knew something different. David was the one who would eventually, after a long struggle and civil war, become king in fact. God planted a seed for the future.

In our Gospel story, Jesus challenged his followers, and us, with a new vision of the Kingdom of God. Traditional thinking about the KOG was apocalyptic—at God's command, armies of angels would sweep down from the sky to wipe out the Romans and all God's enemies, and make Jerusalem the new capital of the world. So along comes Jesus and talks about tiny mustard seeds planted in faith and trust that start out invisible, underground, and take root to grow to glorious results. The idea was planted in the disciples, but wouldn't take root until much later—the idea that the rule of the Crucified and Risen Messiah was to be a peaceable kingdom of love and compassion.

Instead of a political image of how God's will can be done, Samuel and Jesus both offered an organic image—start small, trust, cultivate, and let God work the slow silent miracles of growth and guidance. When I was at CBP, I worked with developing church camp curriculum. We had a series name for one set of that curriculum, it was called "Sow Seeds—Trust the Promise." Those five words described what we were trying to do in the lives of campers. Sow seeds of faith in God's love, and trust God's promise that those seeds would grow.

Who planted seeds of faith, growth, and change in your life? How did God work through people to help you grow as a Christian? Take some time today to name some of those folks. Maybe list them on a piece of paper. Maybe talk about them with your family. Maybe, if they're still alive, call or email them, or send them a little card of thanks. If they've transferred their membership to God's Heavenly Congregation, say a prayer of thanks for them.

How do you help God to plant the seeds of God's future? It can involve a commitment to the well being of the community's school system, such as collecting school supplies like we do under Patty's leadership in August. Inviting children, adults, too, to church and Sunday school is another way of planting seeds. I remember the year I was baptized, when I was invited by a man I didn't know to attend the church's Father-Son banquet as his son. My own father wasn't a church member, and this man's sons were grown and moved away. What an impact that made on me—just to know someone went out of their way to take me to a church dinner. I didn't feel invisible anymore. Also, you can pray for the children of this church and this community and this world, and for their teachers and leaders. That means so much.

Doing volunteer work through Convoy of Hope in August will makes the communities around us more helpful and hopeful places for God's work to be done. Building housing for the poor, like in Habitat for Humanity, is planting seeds of hospitality and grace—and so is donating to Habitat.

Your Search Committee is planting seeds that will help shape this church and its ministry—so support them and pray for them. Stewardship is an act of planting a garden of God's love and grace.

Living Green, in an ecologically responsible way, is another way of investing in the future for our children, to give them a more sustainable world.

However you choose to do it, and you don't have to choose just one thing, know that planting seeds involves trust—trust in God, trust in our children, and trust that the seeds that we planted will sprout, and grow, and come to fruition. Sow the seeds of love and grace, and trust God's promise. Amen.

By Michael E. Dixon