

2023 07 16 – Seeds of the Kindom

Scripture: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (The Inclusive Bible)

Every summer, as I watch gardens grow, I am always amazed that these large and varied plants all originate from such small and even tiny seeds! This year, we are already in the middle of harvest. Those of you who are gardeners, what have you been picking so far? (wait for answers: lettuce, kale, peas, beans, strawberries, raspberries,). If you like mini potatoes and carrots, well they are available in abundance as well.

But, of course, these seeds have been planted in soil especially prepared by experienced gardeners. These plants have been watered, fertilized, weeded and dusted as required for the past couple of months (or longer). They have been carefully planted and well cared for and therefore the crop is abundant.

Today's scripture reading warns us of what happens when seeds are planted in poor soil or when the plants are allowed to be choked by thorny weeds. In this case the plants never even start to grow, or if they start they are unable to thrive and eventually may even wither and die. So the harvest is small or non-existent.

But then, in the second half of today's reading, the author explains that these seeds that Jesus is talking about are not actually growing into plants. This story or parable, like all of Jesus' parables is actually an allegory. And the seeds are actually a message, a message about the kindom of God.

Kindom, the word used in the Inclusive Bible, the translation that was read this morning, is another word for Kingdom or Reign. I actually prefer the word, kindom, because I believe it better reflects the world of peace and justice that Jesus was talking about. "Kingdom," on the other hand, reflects a more hierarchical and even patriarchal world of lords and kings, serfs and peasants.

So if the seeds are the message of the kindom of God, then what is that message? What were the seeds that Jesus was planting? What was the message that Jesus was preaching? What is the message of today's church? What does this kindom of God look like anyway? Can you think of some words or phrases that would describe it? (wait for answers: peace, justice, fairness, love, mutuality, sharing, respect, hospitality, inclusivity...)

So if this is the kindom of God, if this is what Jesus was preaching about and the seeds in this parable are the message of the kindom, then how are they planted? What are the methods that can be used to plant or spread these particular seeds? (wait for answers: Sunday worship, Sunday School, school, bible study, social media, actions, outreach in the community, pastoral care, volunteer at the church, volunteer in the community, at home.) These are all the things that we do as a church, right? This is who we are.

In fact, one of things I like to explore with this parable is who we are in the story. Are we the sower, are we the soil, are we the seed or, is it possible that we could actually be the rocks or the thistles? Where do you see yourself? Are you spreading the seeds of the kindom, are you receiving the message, are you

hindering someone from receiving it or are you the message itself? I believe that we end up taking each one of these roles during our lives and sometimes simultaneously.

Every Sunday morning, it is my hope that through this service of Worship that I and everyone who is leading in the service are sowing the seed with word and prayer and song. Right now we are in our summer season, but in the fall, winter and spring there are usually many more people involved in each service:

Melanie leading Community Learning Time, Mary, James and the choir leading the music, the children lighting the Christ Candle and, of course, our Sunday School teachers. Even now we have our sound people and our ushers and those who will be serving communion today.

It is my hope that during this service of worship that the message of God's kingdom is being sown in each of our hearts and minds. Even if you don't see yourselves as preachers or teachers, know that we all have opportunities to share the message, to be the sower. It could be through facilitation of activities at our church like book studies or bible studies. It could be leadership in other organizations like service clubs, senior's groups, girl guides or scouts. It could be at home with your own children or grandchildren. Think of all the opportunities that you have to be the sower, to spread the seed.

As the author of today's scripture reading points out, we can also be the soil in which the seed is planted. Sometimes we are less receptive than other times, sometimes our hearts are too hardened to receive God's message of love.

Sometimes there are just too many other distractions in our world, too many weeds: work, family, social media, sports, travel, our homes and even our gardens. Sometimes we are so wrapped up in our own lives that we allow the seeds of God's kingdom to die within us. We may be nudged to reach out to a hurting neighbour or friend, but instead watch another episode of our favourite sitcom, read another travel magazine or decide that the dishes need to be washed first.

And, heaven forbid, we can even be the weeds or the rocks that hinder the seed from growing in someone else. We could be the one suggesting that there are better ways of spending our time, we could be the one allowing the news to discourage us and those around us. We could be the one wondering why we even bother.

Or we could be the seed itself. I'll never forget arriving at Bellefair United Church in The Beach in Toronto. I was about 30 years old and searching for myself, for community, trying to figure out my place in the world. And that first Sunday morning I remember Jean Collins welcoming me with open arms and a hug. I'm not sure how she knew that I needed that hug, Jean just seemed to have a way of reading people. On that day, Jean Collins wasn't just spreading the seed, she was the seed, she was the message of God's kingdom. More than any sermon or Bible Study, Jean made me realize what the kingdom was about.

God's kingdom is a place of love, of peace and justice. It is a place of mutuality, of sharing and freedom. We live in a world full of forces that would tell that this kingdom can never exist, and yet we catch glimpses of it everyday.

We have the ability to sow the seeds of the kingdom and to nurture their growth within us and within those around us. That is what it means to be followers of Jesus. This is what it means to be the church. May we all become experienced gardeners in the kingdom of God. May it be so. Amen.