
**My Sermon from Sunday June 13, 2021, '3rd Sunday after
The Day Pentecost' ~ "God Gives The Growth!"**

Speak Lord, your servants are listening. Amen.

Our next door neighbours, the Jarva's, recently planted a maple tree in their front yard. They bought it just after the major frost of a couple of weeks ago. The tree suffered damage from the frost. In faith, they bought and planted this tree with care. I took a careful look at the tree and I noticed that there was almost no growth on the tree and I counted only two healthy leaves. Now, the tree is coming back to life. There are more green leaves on it than I can count!

They planted it. They watered it. God gave the growth.

I know their young son Jayce is eager to tap the tree for the maple sap in the spring and the whole family and their neighbours, including us, are looking forward to bright red leaves in the fall. What a harvest to look forward to! The tree is at 156 Winnipeg Avenue, right next door to us.

This young maple tree reminds me of the kingdom of God. About how it comes from ordinary small things that take root and grow. Heaven comes down to earth when we are active participants in the process. It doesn't just happen by snapping our fingers.

Jesus spoke frequently about the kingdom of God and related it to the miracle of growth in his many farming and growing parables. Two of them are part of our gospel reading this morning from the 4th Chapter of Mark.



In the **Parable of The Growing Seed**, *"Jesus said, the kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground . . . And the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how."* (Mark 4:26-27)

In the **Parable of The Mustard Seed**, Jesus said, *"the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seed on earth yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes*

the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." (Mark 4:30-32)

Over the May long weekend, I planted our cottage vegetable garden. I carefully used a hoe, twine, and sticks to make straight rows and then I planted the seeds. Just 3 weeks later, the seeds have started to grow. Everything is up ~ potatoes, beans, romaine, dill, swiss chard, spinach, lettuce. Here is how the camp garden is looking now:



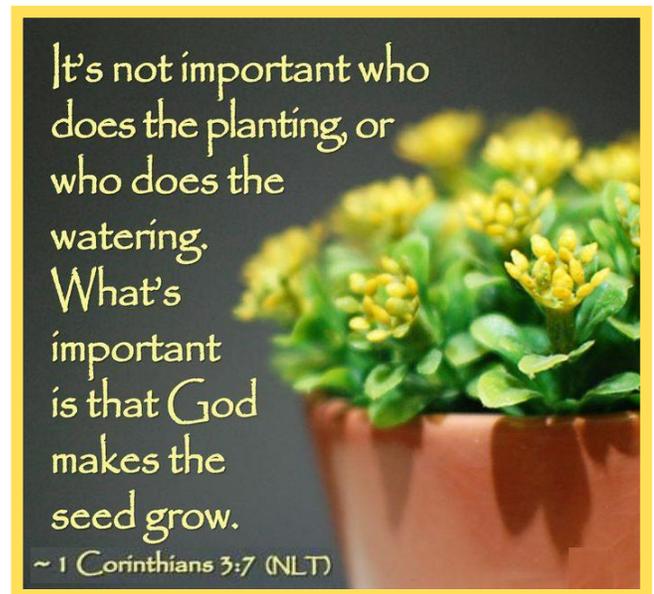
At the beginning of his letter to Christians in Corinth, Paul writes this:

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” (1 Corinthians 3:6-7)

Apollos was an early Christian leader and a colleague of the apostle Paul. Apollos played a strong role in the development of the church in Corinth.

Jesus is calling upon us to do God’s work. Maybe the simple *Gardener’s Prayer* says it best:

**I plant the seed,
You make it grow.
You send the rain,
I work the hoe.**



Jesus reminds us that we have to plant the seeds and then water them and weed them and take care of them. That requires commitment and faithfulness.

When I was pregnant with each of our four child, I cherished the growth of the baby inside me. I had a book which explained the growth that was happening during each week of pregnancy. I was thrilled to learn about the intricate detail of what was occurring within the child. It was all being done in secret. I gave thanks to God for the gift of life and that I could be part of it, *“sharing in the great mystery of childbirth”* (from p. 612, *BAS*, ‘Thanksgiving For The Gift of a Child’)

In these two parables, we know that Jesus is thinking about other things besides gardening and farming. He is thinking about us and the seeds of holy love that we can plant. Then we trust in the wonderful mystery of growth. You and I can only wait and watch and be patient and thrilled when it happens. When the little seeds that I plant take root and I see evidence of the new shoots coming up out of the soil, I am always excited when this happens. My brother-in-law, **Veli**, gave me some of his blue and white perennial ‘forget-me-nots’ to plant. I have nurtured them carefully and all have taken hold.

I understand the line in the poem titled *God’s Garden* by Dorothy Gurney that:

***“one is nearer God’s heart in a garden
than anywhere else on earth.”***

There is a wonder and an appreciation of planting and caring for our flowers and our vegetables. It draws us closer to the love of God, the gifts of creation, and God’s call to us to be part of the kingdom of God.

There is a reverence to gardening and trust. As St. Paul writes, *“We walk by faith, not by sight.”* (2 Corinthians 5:7)

The kingdom of God is like that, Jesus said. When someone plants a seed, God’s kingdom comes by God’s mysterious power, the power of love. When we plant tiny seeds of affirmation in the hearts and minds of others, God causes them to take root and to grow.

When you get both vaccines, each of those two tiny shots in your arm is a seed of hope to protect the world.

I presided at a funeral last week for a teen-ager and the service was live-streamed. I always try to sow seeds of hope. A person who watched the service reached out to me by finding my contact information and has asked me to speak with them about their faith. They have questions and a yearning in their heart. I planted. The person watered. And God is giving the growth.

We were all horrified last week by the senseless and racist killing of the **Afzaal Family** in London, Ontario. And yet out of the seeds of anguish in the hearts of thousands in London, the people rose up and marched against racism and Islamophobia on Friday. A mighty shrub grew out of that tiny mustard seed.

Plant seeds every single day ~ seeds of love, seeds of kindness, seeds of support, and know that they will take root and grow under God's grace. You may not see the harvest but you will be blessed by planting the seeds. You will be an active participant in bringing the kingdom of God right here and right now. In hope and in trust, you will be giving space for God to be God.

In spite of COVID, our church is continuing to grow and that growth is due to God and God alone. You are planting seeds and watering them by worshipping together even in a virtual way. You are chatting together on this live-stream. You are staying in touch with each other. You are praying for each other. You are blessing each other. The large branches are spreading all around the world and giving people safety and comfort, just like the birds of the air who make nests in the shade of the mustard tree.

"I planted. Apollos watered. God gave the growth."

I will go back to kneel in my vegetable garden this afternoon. I will put my hands in the dirt, and probably take off my gardening gloves to do this, and I will remember the **Parable of The Growing Seed** and the **Parable of The Mustard Seed**. And as I weed and take care of the young shoots, I will pray to scatter the eternal seeds of God.



*The kiss of the sun for pardon,
the song of the birds for mirth,*

*One is nearer God's
Heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth.*

-Dorothy Frances Gurney

*The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the birds for mirth ~
One is nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth.*

From the poem *God's Garden* by
Dorothy Gurney

Archdeacon Deborah+
