

The Mustard Seed June 14th 2009

It was the worst of times ...it was the most decisive of times...

Let us imagine if you can coming to church this morning and suddenly we are overtaken by soldiers who horde us into awaiting busses and bring us to some God forsaken wilderness in Canada and take from us any means of transportation or natural resources.. depriving us from any structures or symbols of our identity as baptized Christians and parishioners of St Timothy's. Cut off from all that defines us we are placed in exile.

At first we might consider we are part of a new reality show Survival in the Episcopal Church. Yet soon we become aware of the gravity of our situation : Scenes may flash before us of the Holocaust, genocide in Rawanda, genocide happening right now in Darfur. Many places in our world today such things have happened and continue to happen

The prophet Ezekial having experienced such a devastation as the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon, spent much of his life in captivity.. Ezekiel was a priest in the Temple in charge of ritual celebrations. And now he had nothing to work with except of what was in his heart. Most of Ezekiels prophecies dealt with God's vengeance upon anyone who would seek to defy Yahweh. Yet It was from such a devastating a background that the prophet Ezekiel wrote the comforting words we hear this morning. I will cut from the top of the great cedar and plant it upon a high mountain where it will be born anew , giving life and shade to all the world.

Any sense of Israel relishing in the image of abundant blessing of God would seem ludicrous to anyone witnessing the horror of a people broken, fallen, barren, beaten and blistered

Yet despite the devastation and loss through the prophet Ezekiel God invited the people of Israel to place their trust in Yahweh and not in what they were seeing with their eyes. Trusting that if they would find strength in the faithfulness of God they would find strength in the unseen, their strength from deep within themselves from which their identity would be born anew

Consider the hardened and crusty clay based soil of Northwest Ohio you would think it as a horrible place to start a family garden. And yet in response to the devastating news of an economy gone sour many have done just that.

Each day it is becoming a tradition at the Pepin's for us to step outside to see the latest growth in our garden. We stand in awe at how much it has grown since those days just after planting when we were wondering...is this going to work? .

Yet all our fretting is for not as the actual growth of the plant is really out of our hands. We can merely set the environment, good soil, sunlight and water and let God handle the rest.

It takes time as the seeds that were scattered in the early stages of growth to show their unique contribution to the garden. Some are pumpkins, some are leaves, others corn, others peas, others carrots. It is not until they grow into plants that you can begin to distinguish one from the other.

What seems so simple to understand in gardening become almost an impossible task in one's spiritual life.

We yearn for instantaneous grace that will prove to us once and for all that God created us, knows us, wants to have a relationship with us, and wants to share even his very life with us as daughters and sons.

We yearn for physical proof...show me a sign, work me a wonder, prove it to me. We lose patience quickly demanding God fit into our time frame and we begin to lose hope in his promise.

Yet what God has planted in mystery grows, transforms and will soon become visible...

Yesterday I attended an ordination to the transitional diaconate and the reception of one priest into the Episcopal Church. The bishop had commented that the process that these men and woman had endured was like the longest hurdle race. The process as described is rather intense and lengthy. From the days where the question is raised. Am I being called to ordained ministry? Which sometimes lasts for years... to challenging conversations with the rector, the regional vocation committee, the commission on ministry, the seminary community of students and faculty, the bishop, the standing committee and also your spouse...all of this lasting an incredible amount of time to bear a visible symbol declaring to others that you are indeed called to ordained ministry in the church of God.

What began as a seed of faith planted by someone grows into a fruitful life of faith which in turn plants seeds in others ...

The first step to discernment is believing that God has indeed planted you and just because there is no immediate sign of growth does not mean that beneath the surface that all is dormant.

Quite the contrary God works in mystery and beneath the surface of our lives a whole lot is going on.

One of my observations is that there is some tremendous giants of faith in our parish. Seeds were planted in some cases many years ago and now have rooted, grown and provide to the rest of us food to nourish us.

In some ways we have become so dependent on their shade and their resources we have neglected to recognize the seeds that need yet to be nurtured in our midst.

I pray that we as a community can begin to grasp the incredible miracles happening among us.

Be patient, Be persistent in your pursuit of grace and continue to nurture your spiritual environment especially in times of exile and bewilderment.

Amen.