

Third Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/B): "God's Forget-Me-Not Seeds"
Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15; 2 Cor. 5:6-10, 14-17; Mark 4:26-34
June 12-13, 2021
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

When I was little, my favorite book was *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. I loved the idea of a mysterious flower world behind walls. The closest I've come to that in real life, as an adult, is Helga's garden, on the bend in the road down from church, where Main becomes North Main. Helga's garden isn't a secret, but it certainly is a wonderful flower bower behind its thick lilac hedge. I always feel like I'm on a little adventure when I follow the winding path from Helga's driveway off the municipal parking lot, walking through the lush wildflower garden where something new is blossoming all the time. The appearance of the bright orange, black-speckled Turk's cap lilies with their gracefully curving petals is as sure a sign of summer as the fragrance of honeysuckle in the air on warm evenings.

Around Easter there was a bounty of blue forget-me-nots in Helga's garden. When I admired them, she promised me seeds, once they were done blooming. Sure enough, earlier this week, Helga dropped off a brown paper bag with the seeds and simple instructions: scratch the soil and scatter. (She's shared with me how Champy, her beloved cocker spaniel, loved to romp through the flower beds. They called him "the germinator" because he unwittingly picked up the seeds on his coat and spread them all over the yard!)

The timing of Helga's gift fits perfectly with this weekend's Gospel: "*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) We understand more about the germination of seeds and flowering of plants now than they did 2,000 years ago when Jesus told this

parable, but it's still miraculous, right? Like conception, pregnancy, birth? We've studied these life processes in biology class, but we're still in awe. Like someone has said, "Either everything is a miracle, or nothing is." Ask the scientists among us: science needn't cancel out wonder....

These seed stories of Jesus teach us that God is at work in this world, carefully creating, miraculously bringing forth life, secretly nourishing, nurturing, growing the kingdom of God. The word kingdom usually makes us think of castles and thrones, but the kingdom of God **isn't** a physical place. It isn't a future time. It's every place and every time that God's loving will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus even said, "*The kingdom of God is **within** you,*" (Luke 17:21) sometimes "*The kingdom of God is **among** you.*" We certainly believe the Holy Spirit is both within and among us – so why not the kingdom of God as well? If the kingdom of God isn't within me, am I really a Christian? If the kingdom of God isn't among us, are we really the Body of Christ?

Not that we're approaching perfection! Sometimes we have a very hard time seeing, discerning, God's hand at work in our lives or in the world. Things may look "same ol', same ol'" or worse than ever. So here's the other lesson the seed stories of Jesus teach us: the need to wait with patience in hope until a little green sprout breaks through the soil, buds develop and flowers open and in some cases fruit ripens. We wait with patience in hope for God's plan to reveal itself, for right to prevail over wrong, for justice to triumph, for a holy victory of one sort or another.

But again, from a human perspective, there are times when hope might seem foolish, when we might steel ourselves against yet another disappointment by giving up. A stunning statistic about domestic violence is that it takes an average of 5 tries before a

victim of domestic violence (of any gender) can extricate him or herself. Long about the 3rd or 4th attempt, can't we guess family and friends are exhausted and skeptical? Same for an addict's journey into recovery. Two steps forward, four steps back. Three steps forward, two steps back. God-willing, eventually, there are more steps forward than back. Over months? Over years?

After a while, some people's chances at living resurrection look dead on the vine. And yet, our Jesus says, God is powerfully at work. Do not give up hope. Let the psalmist's heart cry in Psalm 130 become your prayer when times are hard and hope is elusive:

¹Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. (NRSV)

¹⁻² Help, GOD—I've hit rock bottom!

Master, hear my cry for help!

Listen hard! Open your ears!

Listen to my cries for mercy. (The Message)

*⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;*

*⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.*

⁷ O... hope in the LORD!

*For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem. (NRSV)*

Things, relationships, possibilities can look so dead and yet still be so alive. In contrast to the flourishing flowers in Helga's garden of Paradise, there's been a very sad-looking, leafless, bare trunk of some kind of plant in a pot outside the cleaners down the street in the other direction. The thick stalk is three or four feet tall, topped by 3 bare branches sprouting out of the very top. I've walked past it for weeks and thought, "What in Heaven's name....?" But my friend inside the cleaners has an amazing green thumb, judging by the lush Christmas cactus, fuschia, amaryllis, you name it, gracing the premises. So I've

trusted that there was indeed hope that this odd specimen would come to life, in time. Alleluia! In this past week each of the 3 branches has grown 2 or 3 or 4 leaves! My dry cleaning friend looked back at her plant's past performance and patiently waited in hope, simply putting that pot out in the sun and letting Mother Nature do her thing, take her time.

That's what we need to do, too, right? We need to look back at our Lord's past performance, the endless episodes of faithfulness in our big salvation history and in our little personal histories, and we need to wait patiently in hope. *"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."* Slow and secret, but sure....

Just to make things a little more interesting and to leave you more to think about, someone has pointed out there **is** a difference between patient, hope-filled waiting and lapsing into a "spiritual coma."¹ In other words, we always need the Holy Spirit's help to figure out if God is saying, "Don't just do something! Stand there!" or "Don't just stand there! Do something!" Is the Lord saying, "Pray to God, but don't forget to row to shore"? Or "Be still and know that I am God"? Are we supposed to **act** or **wait**? 'Not always easy to discern. This is why we're wise to ask the Holy Spirit's help, always. This is why we run things by soul friends, looking for holy advice. This is why we dwell in the Word and invest our time and energy in worship, because God speaks through all these channels.

A final prayer: Dear Holy Spirit, by Your grace may we be like little Champy, running joyfully through our neighborhood and world, scattering Gospel forget-Me-not seeds wherever we go, seeding the world with God. Amen

¹*Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 7, NY: Abingdon, 1951), p. 705.

