

Fourth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/B)/Father's Day: "Fuggedaboutit!"  
Ezekiel 17:22-24; Mark 4:26-34  
June 15-16, 2024  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

This weekend our front yard sign says:

GOD BLESS  
SUN. SCHOOL TEACHERS!  
SOWERS OF  
FAITH, HOPE & LOVE

Our honoring of Holy Trinity's Sunday School team coincides perfectly with today's Gospel about seeds. It's not the more familiar story of the sower and the seed, in which some seeds fall on fertile ground and others in stony or thorny places. What Jesus tells us today is deceptive in its simplicity. Seed is planted, it grows, and is harvested. So what??

I've actually entitled this reflection "Fuggedaboutit!" because of *The Message* paraphrase of the beginning of today's Gospel:

*26-29 Then Jesus said, "God's kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows—he has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without his help: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. When the grain is fully formed, he reaps—harvest time!"*

It's kinda puzzling. It's a rare field or garden that doesn't require TLC **after** the planting of seed: weeding, fertilizing, irrigating, maybe erecting or repairing a fence so the deer and bunnies don't eat the tender shoots or nibble the tasty flowers. And it's not like we can mail postcards, send an e-blast, post a Facebook message about the beginning of Sunday School and then quit. Donna needs to line up teachers and subs, teachers need to show up and teach, Youth & Family Ministry needs to plan Sunday Fundays, Advent craft and Christmas pageant, Good Morning, Good Friday, and maybe an end-of-year carnival (mark your calendars for next spring!). Ministry of all kinds is **work!** It's **not** like \$ we put in a savings account that will grow out of sight, over time, without us doing anything more.

And yet: like Paul wrote to the people of Corinth, “*I planted the seed, and Apollos watered it, but **God** made it grow.*” (1 Cor. 3:6) The Lord deputizes us to do God’s work in this world, including nurturing our children, our youth, our families, in the faith, but ultimately the outcome is up to God! Let’s say Jesus makes 3 points in today’s Gospel:

#1: Nothing takes root, sprouts, grows, bears fruit, without God’s grace.

#2: God gives mysterious, miraculous growth, **in God’s time**, in the **fullness** of time, time we can’t track on a watch or calendar.

#3: God guarantees the outcome. The kingdom of God **will** come, gloriously.

As Martin Luther teaches in the *Small Catechism* explanation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> petition of the Lord’s Prayer, the kingdom **will** come; our prayer is that it will **also** come **to us**.

Christian education, and ministry of **all** kinds, takes wisdom. It requires holy discernment, the ability to weigh when we plant, water, weed and when we stand back and “Fuggedaboutit!”, having done what we can do, trusting that blessed growth is taking place in secret, as we pray in our Saturday night Eucharistic prayer:

We praise you for the fertile earth and for the life its darkness holds and births: plants of every variety....

“The life its darkness holds and births....” So much is happening, invisible to our eyes.

Amy-Jill Levine is a woman with an unusual profession: she is a Jewish New Testament scholar. Her reflections on the Gospels are especially helpful, since Jesus was Jewish and everything He talks about is rooted in Judaism. Her take on this parable is:

- 1) **Some things just need to be left alone** for awhile, like rising bread that won’t be happy if we keep opening the oven door to peek and see if it’s rising, letting the warmth out, and **preventing** it from rising;
- 2) **Sometimes we need to get out of the way**, like when we’ve taken off the training wheels and a child is able to wobble along proudly on 2 wheels instead of 4! If we

hover too close and run alongside for too long, they'll never be confident to truly do it on their own.

Jesus is telling us that the fullness of time will come for all things, including the coming of the kingdom. It doesn't come on our command, it won't follow our preferred schedule; it will arrive in God's perfect time, like the baptisms of Maddie and Teal, like unexpected emotional healing in families, like entry into recovery from addiction or escape from domestic violence, like finding one's perfect partner, like the birth of a long-awaited child.

Some things can't be hurried. Here are two examples. One is something dumb I did and the other is from something I read.

#1 There was a doozy of an ice storm years ago. The shrubs outside the parsonage were encased in ice. The branches were so weighed down they looked like they might break. I decided to help them along with the shovel I'd used to clear the steps and sidewalk. I chopped at the ice with the edge of the shovel and you can guess what happened: I cut off rather than saving a few branches! Eventually I remembered Aesop's fable about the contest between the sun and wind to see who could make a man shed his coat faster. The wind laughed and said it was a sure thing he'd win, because he could easily blow the coat right off the man! He tried; the harder the wind blew, the tighter the man pulled his coat around him. Then the sun gently shone on the man, and as he warmed up he simply removed his coat without any drama. The point being: I went back inside that winter day and sure enough, within a couple hours the sun had gently melted the ice off the shrubs without loss of a single leaf.

#2 The story from literature about the importance of patience, and waiting on God's time: in one of Nikos Kazantzakis' books he tells of a boy who found a cocoon. The boy knew a butterfly lay within it, and he couldn't wait to see it! Thinking himself very clever,

he warmed the cocoon with his breath until it started to crack open like a milkweed pod. He lay it on the ground to see the magic unfold. Sure enough, a butterfly emerged, but its wings were wet. It could only limp along a few inches and then it died before ever taking flight. It was not the fullness of time for it to emerge. We just can't rush a miracle.

Our Sunday School team experiences a lot of joy and holy satisfaction along the Way, but also not a little frustration when lessons are forgotten or worse, when students simply don't show up to be taught. It's also disheartening if the newly confirmed disappear from sight. But Jesus says, "Take heart! The coming of the kingdom is a sure thing – but in God's time not yours." My daily devotional calendar has this quote from Simone Weil:

Even if your efforts seem for years to be producing no result, one day a light that is in exact proportion to them will flood your soul.

"Don't worry!" says the Lord to mothers and fathers, grandparents, Sunday School teachers. "I've got this. I love these children even more than you do. Seeds of faith, hope and love sown with such devotion are sure to germinate, root, sprout, and flower. You may see **little** growth but I see **all** of it: past, present and future," says the Lord. "You're looking at the back of the tapestry, a chaos of color, threads and knots. I see the front, and the beautiful image of the kingdom of God that is appearing, **by** divine grace, but **with** human help. Do your best and then fuggedaboutit! Someday you'll see how the seeds sown by you grew into a miraculous harvest, even and especially in the lives of the kids you worried about most."

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

