

“Bloom where you are Planted”

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I am a Christian. You might wonder what heresy is about to follow when the preacher begins a sermon with that assurance. I say this, on this morning, because I feel that being a Christian does not come naturally to me. I marvel at others for whom faith seems to come so naturally, and who appear to wear their discipleship so lightly, and with such easy confidence. I always have more questions about my faith than answers, sometimes have trouble seeing God in all the tragic events of the world, and I wrestle constantly with parts of our collective history and the enormous mistakes we have made in the name of Jesus Christ. I am a Christian, but one who must work hard to keep the muscles of my faith fit and able.

This morning we have two readings before us that also seem to acknowledge faith does not always come naturally, or easily, to God’s people. They are texts very dissimilar to each other: the first from Genesis, a story from our collective family tree which began with Abraham and Sarah and moves this morning to Isaac and Rebekah; and the second, a parable of Jesus about a sower, seed, and the soil. What I think they hold in common is a lesson in how quickly best laid plans can go awry, and that such struggles and missteps are as much a part of a life of faith, as the moments of joy and success.

Rebekah and Isaac want a baby. They pray to God, and because God is good and generous, God gives them two – twins Esau and Jacob. It might have been a moment of great thanksgiving for the expectant parents, but very soon gratitude turns to complaint as the strains and challenges of being a parent become real. “If it is to be this way, why do I live!” cries Rebekah as her children wrestle in her womb, expressing a sentiment that perhaps every parent has felt in a moment of familial frustration.

Following that rocky beginning, the family seems to devolve into conflict, dysfunction and chaos. Sibling rivalry between Esau and Jacob. Favouritism among the parents. Plots and schemes to undermine and hurt each other. Not exactly what we picture when we say “Christian family values.” So what might this text say to us this morning? It surely illustrates how very human we are, how intense and complicated family relationships can be, and how deeply we can hurt and be hurt by the ones we love.

And yet, from these seeds God grows three great faith traditions who trace their roots to Abraham – Islam, Judaism and Christianity. And each of us today are descendants of this faith story, children of this common family tree, and can be grateful for the human, all too human, ones who walked and stumbled on this path before us.

This brings me to our second text, a well-known parable of Jesus. A sower goes out to sow seed, and rather than look for the perfect, cultivated, freshly turned field or garden upon which to sew the valuable seed, this sower throws seed indiscriminately, far and wide, to and fro in every direction. Seed falls on paths, rocks, weeds, thorns, bird feeders – with only a precious few managing to drop rightly into rich, fertile, “good” soil.

As an economist by training and former occupation, this is my worst nightmare. Economists work to ensure scarce resources are allocated to their most efficient and effective use and purpose. The practice of wastefully casting valuable seed, without aim or discipline, is outrageous! I'm reminded of the times I've had my young sons help me seed the front lawn with grass seed. I fill the small hand-cranked seed spreader, give it to one son, who immediately spills seed off the side into a large pile on the ground. They then take turns churning the seed spreader, dumping piles over the sides, and covering the driveway, sidewalks, car, neighbour's fence, and only by sheer luck, the lawn.

"You never know, Dad, it might grow there!" they say with delight! Out of the mouths of babes, I guess. Once again, I am reminded of how children are so connected to God without filter or fear, and how much I can learn from my boys about the Sower/Creator. "It might grow there!" Planting seeds is always an act of hope, trust, patience and joy. It's an act of faith in God's power to surprise and transform.

Today, I see in these two readings assurances of God's unfailing generosity towards creatures and Creation, and God's never-ending fund of hope and fountain of growth. God gifts us with life and resources and gives us plenty of room to wonder/wander, roam, choose, make big mistakes, stumble, fall, knock the dust off and get back up again. God is generous to our fault, and hopeful to our finding.

I'm afraid that we too are children of Rebekah and Isaac, who hurt, exclude, and struggle with each other for advantage. But we are also always children of God, brothers and sisters of one family, who can not part from each other, even if we try. We are also the soil, rocky or rich, where God's Word finds root and surprises us with fruits and delights most unexpected. And I suggest we are also the seed, cast widely and generously by God, to make roots in our own personal contexts, and to bloom where we're planted. We are God's seeds and living Words of hope, healing, growth and life abundant.

One last thought. I know the last few months have been difficult for many of you, as they have been for me. It is a time of physical distancing and social isolation, where we worry about our health and the health of our loved ones and communities. This has been accompanied by social unrest, violence and scenes of injustice and pain too grievous to deny or ignore. If you are anything like me, you may long for us all to be together again in person in our beloved church, finding comfort in bread and wine, and seeing, touching and caring for one another in a time such as this. I know the last few months have not been easy. I feel it too. You are strong and you are good. This painful interruption will not last forever.

I want to give the last word to the mystic Meister Eckhardt, who many times found in the simple elements of Creation the wisdom of the Creator. He writes, "Pear seeds grow into pear trees. Nut seeds grow into nut trees. God's seeds [that is, you and me], grow into God."

So that's what I want to encourage us to do today – to grow into God, into the fullness of the person God created you to be. Bloom where you are planted, today and every day, in whatever soil God has placed you. And let us never forget the hope and generosity that is the very heart of God the Creator, the same very heart that beats in each of us. Amen.