

## Parables

Planting seeds is an act of hope. Those of you who farm or raise gardens or flowers know this. Each spring, we put those seeds into the soil. Maybe while we're planting, we imagine the crop at its end – corn and soybeans filling bins and elevators.

Lush tomatoes and crisp lettuce on our tables. Beautiful flowers surrounding our home.

At the time we plant, we have high hopes that those seeds will bear fruit. But the reality is, we never know what sort of year it will be...maybe the rabbits will eat all your peas and green beans, or floods will wash away your field.

Or maybe this year will be a bumper crop.

Those are the kinds of images Jesus is using to talk about the kingdom of God.

In all of us who have at one time or another been a part of the church, and in many of those who have not, the seeds have been sown.

In the same mysterious way of all seeds, we never exactly know what will happen with that seed. Sometimes it never seems to bear fruit at all. Other times, it bears vast amounts of fruit.

But what does it even mean to bear fruit when the seed of God's word has been planted? Actually a pretty good list comes from Paul's letter to the Galatians: the fruits of that seed are the fruits of the spirit within us - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Let's look at this mystery of planted seeds in a more concrete and timely example. I'm going to say first of all that I believe God doesn't just plant seeds in Christians, so we'll start our tale with Mahatma Gandhi. Born Mohandas Gandhi to a Hindu family in India in 1869, seeds were planted very early on by his Hindu mother.

He was also profoundly shaped by the Indian classics he read which led him to identify deeply with the virtues of truth and love.

Other seeds for him were planted when he lived in South Africa and experienced the discrimination against people of color there.

He would go on to lead a movement of non-violent resistance against British rule and oppression of the Indian people, and also against discrimination by caste and gender.

He believed that what he called the love force or soul force was more effective than brute force.

His non-violent movement eventually led to the end of British rule, without war. The movement also improved the lives of women and the so-called untouchable caste in India.

His work influenced Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. whose birthday we celebrate tomorrow. Seeds from the fruit Ghandi bore took root in Dr. King. The basic idea of Ghandi's love force or soul force is expressed in one of Dr. King's quotes – darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate...only love can do that.

Dr. King's non-violent civil rights movement led to the civil rights act of 1964 and the voting rights act of 1965. It brought about the end of the discriminatory and hateful Jim Crow laws that oppressed African Americans. It was the beginning of the end of racial and ethnic injustice.

Anytime we see a more just world emerge...a world where all of God's children can thrive, we know that a seed of God's word has taken root and grown. That's how the Kingdom of God unfolds.

A beautiful example of love winning over hate happened in Lincoln just this past week. After a vandal painted a swastika and graffiti on the front of the South St. Temple, an outpouring of love and support washed over the B'nai Jeshurun congregation which worships there.

A GoFundMe account was set up with a \$5000 goal for repairs. Within 24 hours, the GoFundMe account was over \$12,000.

That is the seed of God's word bearing fruit. And it doesn't much matter what religion, if any, those who responded were. God's word has been sown lavishly over all kinds of ground. We can always be surprised in whom it takes root.

So, let's bring this back to us. We may never be the next Martin Luther King, Jr. But the same seed that was sowed in him was planted in us.

That seed is growing in you. Maybe you can point to times you've seen it...maybe places where you've grown or had new insights. Anytime you express those fruits of the spirit from Paul's letter to the Galatians - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – any time you practice one of those with another, the seed is bearing fruit.

Sometimes we get a definite sense that that seed is just waiting to bust out and bear fruit. Sometimes it already has and we're waiting to see what's next. That seed is what gives us our sense of call.

How do we nurture that seed?

The first step is to recognize that in fact it's God who nurtures it. God's spirit within us nourishes that seed.

Our role is to put ourselves in places where we can better connect to that spirit and that nourishment.

Worship, hearing God's word, receiving Christ's body and blood in communion...all of those are important in nurturing that seed.

Prayer and meditation are especially important. In times of quiet reflection and meditation, we become more in tune with God's presence within us. We become more aware of the seed planted in us. We become more aware of our connection to others and to all of creation.

And somewhere in those depths of silence, we will hear God's call to whatever fruit it is we are to bear. Your call may not be to follow in Martin Luther King Jr.'s steps to take on in a big way the persistent bits of systemic racism in our culture. I hope in some small way it is for all of us.

And for sure, God is calling you to something, even if it's simply prayer for a specific situation.

In the absence of prayer and some form of quiet time, we can't tune in to that God within us. Then, we are either far too likely to jump into action that is completely wrong and that actually opposes God's kingdom, or we get burned out battling evil on our own.

On the other hand, in the absence of action, the seed bears no fruit, and prayer and meditation become an exercise in narcissism.

As we learn to foster this connection, be prepared to be surprised...the emerging kingdom of God is not always predictable. The seed may not bear the fruit we expected.

And be prepared to see the kingdom in the small things...the mustard seed...the baby born to a peasant couple in Bethlehem...the broken man on the cross, who appeared to be an utter failure.

We are often drawn to the loud, splashy, big, strident – but the way of the kingdom is often more like a tiny seed growing in the earth, or a child growing in a mother's womb.

Be prepared to see the kingdom emerge in small acts of hope.

And you can trust that God is nurturing the seed in you and calling you to something. Be brave and take a step in faith...even a tiny one. To quote Martin Luther King, Jr. again, you do not need to see the whole staircase to take the first step.

Contemplation – seed in you