



The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (B)
June 17, 2018
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Very often in the early stages of homily preparations, my ‘go-to’ resource is Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN. The seminary there has outstanding professors and national contributors to a website at www.workingpreacher.org.

One of the professors at Luther recently said that “Parables are comparisons, meant to cast two things alongside one another to provide analogy, contrast, or reflection... Jesus’ parables... have a way of reordering conventional assumptions and values. They don’t explain *how* one is supposed to recognize the reign of God, but they make it clear that we will need to adopt or receive new ways of perceiving.” (Matt Skinner: https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3676)

In today’s Gospel, we have two parables back-to-back which on the surface seem pretty straightforward. At a deeper level, the parables point us to envision a new reality and call us “to adopt” a new way of “perceiving”.

Very recently, I made a foray into the plant world as experienced at Countryside greenhouse in Allendale. I was amazed at so many eye-popping and beautiful flowers, plants and shrubs. Row after row of flowers dazzled my imagination and challenged my lack of knowledge about growing flowers and shrubs. I even took photos of the rows of beautiful hanging baskets just waiting to find new homes. I remember feeling like a kid in a candy store.

Before I even got into the greenhouse, I had a delicious corn dog from the outside food truck and then a double scoop of ice cream just inside the main doors! I was primed and ready to be amazed, and I was amazed.

Who isn’t amazed at God’s creation in beautiful flowering plants and green shrubs which adorn our gardens and decks especially in late spring! Who doesn’t delight when one sees flowers reaching to the sky giving glory to God in nature and that delight the human spirit!

Today, we will delight in the Baptism of an adorable baby, Clara Rose Beyer. She will be baptized and sealed for Christ forever. One way of looking at what will happen is to think about an invisible mark on the soul which no one will ever be able to erase.

We will smile and give God thanks. We will pour blessed water and use blessed oil called chrism, and the awaited Baptism will initiate Clara in to God’s family, God’s household, God’s way of life in and through Jesus. The Sacrament of Baptism will conclude with the giving of a miniature Paschal Candle, a symbol of Christ and his life, death and resurrection. Clara will have been reborn this day. The hopes and dreams of her loving parents, godparents, grandparents and all who love her are amplified on this holy day of Baptism, as Clara is welcomed into the life of the Christian Community.

Life: Like seeds planted in the ground, we long for little ones to grow into strong and mature adults. We long for them to have happy and healthy lives with mothers and/or fathers who love and care for them. We long for them to mirror the love of Jesus for them, so that those around them will also know that love and know life. Our hearts break when we see images or read stories of children taken away from parents for all the wrong reasons. As followers of Jesus, we long for life for all children and all people no matter what race, color, creed, sexuality or country of origin. Today’s parables are about life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is about life.

During springtime in Michigan and elsewhere, the cold and solid ground of winter has given way to the warm and fertile ground into which we plant seeds, plants and shrubs. And then, we wait. Like farmers waiting for crops to germinate and grow, so, too, do we wait.

Waiting for God's grace to take root in our lives is not a passive process but an active one. When we cooperate with that grace, we allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us, yes, and to move us into ways of life, into ways of truth, justice, mercy and action. Our Breakfast Café is an example of God's grace in action here at St. Mark's. Contacting Congress on behalf of innocent children is an example of God's grace in action. Praying for those in need and those for whom we have promised to pray is an example of God's grace in action. Giving of ourselves for the sake of others is an example of God's grace in action.

In Mark 4:26, Jesus indicates that growth will happen "gradually and automatically", indicative of the reign of God already at work, already implanted in creation and in our hearts. Growth in the Christian life happens gradually and automatically when we are in tune with God's love implanted in our hearts.

We spiritually grow when we are open and disposed to being formed and shaped into a new creation. When we cooperate with God's grace and allow it to transform us, something new, something wonderful happens. With God's help, God's reign in us "will grow so subtly that we won't even notice, until at last it produces its intended fruit." (https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3676)

How do we produce fruit in our lives as Christians? What would that actually look and feel like to us in our lives as followers of Jesus?

We produce fruit as Christians when we embrace the love of God in Jesus and work to transform the world in which we live. We produce fruit when the Word of God in the Scriptures becomes our word, when we make it our own and embrace something new, a new creation, reaching out to help bring life to the world.

How we become something new, life-givers, life-bearers to others as Christians, is up to us! God's grace is with us and in us. The fertile soil of God's love is ripe within us, ripe for planting, ripe for germination and ripe for growth.

When we allow the Spirit of God to overtake us in ways like never before, we are reborn in the Spirit. We can and will bear much fruit. The world so much in need of God's love will experience the love of God through us like never before.

During this Season of Pentecost, let us embrace the Spirit of God and be transformed. Let us rejoice in the Baptism of Clara, in the rebirth that is ours and work to transform the world in which we live, work and play. Amen.