

## The Secret Life of the Seed

In the name of the One God, Father and Mother of us all:  
Seed-giver, Life-bearer, and Sustainer. *Amen*

As Jim and I were walking along the river yesterday,  
I spied a magnificent holly bush, simply and humbly  
nestled amongst the brush at the water's edge.

Surprised and excited at my unexpected discovery,  
I pointed it out and he said, "I wonder how it got there?"  
"Probably a bird or some other critter," I replied.

And that little vignette strikes me  
as pretty well summing up Chapter 4 in Mark's gospel.

So much happens in bringing God's kingdom to fruition  
that we ourselves have no understanding how it works.  
How this seed got planted here, was nurtured, watered,  
and grew to maturity to bear more fruit.

Or how a seed found itself over there, on the other bank,  
unable to make it for who knows why.

Maybe the vines and thorns were too invasive.

Not enough sunlight. Too much water. Who knows?

But don't you think that God's word has a way of travelling  
around, intentionally and unintentionally;  
that one has no way of determining whether  
what one has done has any lasting impact,  
if it 'took' or if it withered.

Yet isn't it kind of a relief,  
to realize that it's not all about us?  
That's a big burden lifted in my mind.

It's like the mystery of the sacrament we receive.  
We don't not have to presume to have all the answers  
in order to be instruments of God's work in the world.  
Isn't it true that we can trust the Master Gardener  
to know best how to tend Her garden?

Mystery is one of the truths about our faith.  
So it is ironic and unsurprising  
that such a powerful, multivalent parable  
alluding to the mysterious, behind-the-scenes workings  
of the "secret life of the seed" *is itself tucked away*,  
in-between the two better known parables-

- “The Sower” and “The Mustard Seed.”

This obscure miniature gem is titled

“The Seed Produces Itself.”

But let’s just call it “The Seed.”

It’s like the holly that I noticed,  
but would have missed outright  
if I hadn’t been intently been looking in that direction.  
Put another way, if it were a movie,  
we might call it “a sleeper.”

There’s a dearth of commentary about this passage.

But one biblical commentator suggests,

“In an oddly appropriate way,  
this parable seems a bit like the seed of which it tells –  
small, buried, left alone, unfolding a mystery in secret.”

Paul Duke, author of *The Parables - A Preaching Commentary* (2005)

I agree.

I chose the first hymn we sang this morning,  
“Now the Green Blade Riseth”  
to reflect the mystery of Resurrection,  
new life unfolding, arising from death’s seeming victory.

Now I know many of you appreciate a good mystery, eh?  
It poses lots of questions for us along the way,  
and in the end, the mystery is solved (hopefully)!

In the mystery of The Seed,  
I wonder about the vagueness of the character;  
less of a ‘who *done* it’ and more like, ‘who *is* it?’  
Is it God? Jesus? Us?  
Also, is this “someone” even qualified to do the job?  
I know many of us ponder this question periodically.  
He’s not identified as a farmer *or* sower  
and yet he’s the one who collects the fruits of the harvest?

Also of concern is the question of the *difference*  
between scattering and sowing?

Scattering implies haphazard or random action  
whereas sowing sounds more intentional.  
The character here didn't do *anything*  
but go to bed and wake-up!

I also wondered - *Why* focus on the *stages* of growth?  
And what is the *duration* of its lifespan?  
Does it help us to feel confident  
that God's process is sufficient and underway  
although from a mere mortal's perspective,  
appears to be quite random or chaotic?

The purpose for veiled meaning is confirmed  
in the concluding verse of "The Seed"  
and its famous cousin "The Mustard Seed". (v. 33,34)  
The theme of where one stands relative to God's kingdom,  
continues in Mark's gospel.

Remember Jesus' family attempting to 'rescue' him,  
as they stood outside of the home where he was staying  
and he pointed to the disciples seated around him and  
said, 'Here, are my family...

those who do the will of my father,  
are my mother, brother, sister’.

The fact that Jesus spoke so often in parables,  
that could only be understood as he explained them,  
but to onlookers - his message was lost, is hard to  
understand.

It could be, that how we view *God*  
*and how God acts in the world* reveals to us  
how we view *humanity* and *who we are called to be*.  
But how that process of transformation takes place,  
from seed to fruit is a mystery;  
not to be dissected but embraced.

How that seed of God develops within each of us,  
from stage to stage, point A to point B  
is seemingly random most of the time.  
Who is planting seeds among whom  
is definitely fuzzy and less than straight forward.

Who is doing the scattering?  
Where does it happen? And when?

Maybe scattering random seeds of kindness,  
small doses of God's love, is more like burrs.  
You know, the Velcro-type seed that clings to your clothing  
while hiking or becomes embedded in your dogs' fur.

It was a ritual upon returning home from hiking with Hope,  
my beloved (now departed) very furry Keeshond; that I  
would painstakingly pry those tenacious seeds off her AND  
I also remind myself about the 3rd Commandment –  
page 350 of the BCP for those with inquiring minds.

What if we're called to be tenacious seeds of God's love –  
or better yet, how do *we* cling to God's love?  
Does it matter that I know where I've picked them up  
or where some may have dropped off along the way?  
Does it matter I know which ones will find hospitable soil  
to take root and flourish?

Life has its challenges for sure.

But the only way to avoid more dangerous harmful pests, ticks for instance, is to not go out on the trails, metaphorically speaking.

Sure, you might avoid unwanted problems, but the beautiful random seeds of God's love are then a lost opportunity as well.

The only way I can control those persistent hitchhikers is to keep off the trails. That's just not an option.

Imagine this, Jesus always on the move, picking up burrs along the way, and some he even *named*...disciples.

He and his companions travelled about scattering seeds of God's love – the message of the kingdom of God, everywhere they went.

In 2 Corinthians we hear that  
“whether we are at home or away,  
we make it our aim to please God.”



Some of us rarely travel, home is as far as we want to go.  
Others of us travel for any number of reasons.

But wherever we are near or far,  
consider that we may be scattering,  
or picking up seeds along the way.  
Sure, we *can* try to be intentional  
about sowing seeds out of our well-tilled Christian faith,  
but most often it's the mustard-seed moments  
in the routines of our daily living  
whereby *something mysterious* of God takes root,  
in us, in others.

And then a precious seed finds its way into fertile soil  
where it will root and grow –  
“first the stalk, then the head,  
then the full grain in the head.” (v.28)

*Grace provides* what the seed needs to grow and mature.

*Grace underlies* the secret life of seeds.

*Grace brings awareness*

to the one who haphazardly, unintentionally scatters seed  
but later comes to recognize the fruit of the harvest  
and once inspired, goes to work with intentionality.

*Grace opens up* new levels of understanding  
as we are able to hear it, and bear it.

Scripture is living, growing and so are we.

What we hear one day may be different the next.

Jesus *knows* precisely where we are  
in that mysterious unfolding of spiritual growth.

As disciples, both as *receptors* and *sowers* of the seed,  
we can be confident that the mysterious,  
secret growth within us, will continue with *God's help*.

*With God's help* we will be nurtured and guided  
so that our lives reveal to others, the Source that sustains.

**Grace** is the catalyst and guide to carry out God's work,  
in the "secret life of the seed."

Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing  
as co-cultivators of God's love.

Amen

Amma Susan+