

Nest

Matthew 13:31-33 "Nest"

JUL 20 2007 Pentecost 10A / Ordinary 16A

I like the Mustard Seed Parable. I always have. It emphasizes that the smallest good thought, the smallest prayer, the smallest good deed, the smallest good gesture can grow into something miraculous and amazing. Think for a moment about your most beautiful dream for the future. Right now it's in your heart alone, no one else's but yours, but you share it with a friend, who shares it with another, the dream begins to grow, just like that tiny mustard seed growing into a big tree, in the branches of which birds peacefully build their nests. From such a small dream, organizations for social betterment are born, movements for change are created, revolutions that renew the world begin. And just imagine the goal - a beautiful world where birds and many other creatures, people included, build their nests, their shelters, their homes, their communities and everyone lives in peace, everyone enjoys clean water, everyone smells the fresh air, everyone can taste the delicious food that we grow and share, imagine a world with children eager to learn, adults eager to teach and share, jobs that build up communities, communities filled with diversity and lots of love and care.

I could hand out mustard seeds this morning, but the point of course is not the mustard seed, but the idea of something small beginning to grow, so that you know that the special dream that is in your heart, if you plant that seed the rest of us will water it and care for it with you. We may even build our nests in the branches of your great idea.

Jesus told the story of the mustard seed for the same reason, not to encourage people to go out and plant mustard seeds and then to enjoy the shade of the trees that would grow and the birds that will sing in its branches, but to encourage hope in every heart. Keep in mind that most of the people in Galilee who were drawn to Jesus were poor, landless peasants, who had next to nothing, no money, not enough food, no connections to people in high places, no hope, no future. They lived in a society that had crushed them down every inch of the way. When they'd run out of money they'd had to sell their land, which was their heritage and identity, and then they worked as tenants on the land that had formerly been their own, but for wages that were a pittance, and they had to scrape to survive. You can see why people like that would listen to Jesus when he came by.

So I like the Mustard Seed Parable, and I hope you like it too. Of all the things in the Bible, it is one of the most easily remembered and most easily understood stories of all. It is not dense with theology and doctrine like so much of Paul's many letters. It is not filled with unpronounceable names like much of the Old Testament. Right now I could ask anyone here, youth or adult, to stand up and tell the story in your own words and you'd do it well.

But there is one thing that is uncomfortable about the story. It can easily be a parable of greed, not about dreams for peace and healing and justice, but about money and power. I keep reading about Chief Executive Officers of large corporations whose greed seems to know no bounds. I don't know much about the man, but the owner and founder of a large cable company was recently sentenced to a long, long jail term, along with one of his sons, for plundering millions of dollars from the company, stealing money from the stockholders who had trusted him. I read that he began the company years ago with a small investment, and the value of that investment grew and grew, just like that little mustard seed ... but the greed grew too.

So my point is to check your dream for that flaw. Ask yourself, "*Is my dream one of greed or one of generosity? Is my dream for just myself and those closest to me, or is it for as many people as possible, including people I don't know, who are different from me? Will the result of my dream be singing birds building nests in the branches of my dream?*"

The other night I met with the session of another church that is also working on Natural Church Development. I began by asking them all to introduce themselves, and to name their responsibilities in the church, but also to name a spiritual gift that others around the table might not know about. One of the men described himself as an engineer by training with responsibilities for church finances and the building. He looked like a serious, no-nonsense braniac. But then he mentioned a spiritual gift that know else knows about. He said he loves art, and that for fifty years he's always wanted to do more with his talent for drawing. Everyone around the table immediately began thinking the same thing: I didn't know that! And then they began thinking about this hidden gift might be a blessing to the whole congregation. It was like they were the birds landing on the branches of his spiritual gift, ready to build their nests there. I was a visitor at that meeting, substituting for someone on our vacation, but I hope I will get a chance to visit them again, to see how that man's spiritual gift might be flourishing.

Being a member of a community of faith like ours is to love the sharing of dreams, of spiritual gifts, so that we can enjoy building nests in the wonderful ideas and dreams of the people around us.

We invite people into our faith community, not to meet a quota, but to expand the circle of disciples of Jesus who are eager to discover, share and encourage spiritual gifts that have the power to change the world.

Communion ... a small glass of juice and a small bit of bread, but we dare to believe, in fact we are proud of believing, that such a small taste from God's bountiful table can grow into a mighty feast of love and peace for the whole world.

