

“Flourishing Seeds”

Mark 4:26-34 & Psalm 92:1-4 & 12-15

Pastor James York

July 4, 2021

Prayer for Understanding Your presence in the world, O God, is quiet, subtle, but steady, like the warmth of the sun, the gentle power of wind, the secret germination of a seed. So, give us eyes to see and ears to hear and hearts open to experience your love, your kingdom on earth. Amen.

In her book *The Seeds of Heaven* Barbara Brown Taylor wrote, “If we want to speak of heavenly things, we may begin by speaking about earthly things, and if we want to describe that which is beyond all words, we may begin with words we know such as: man, woman, field, seed, bird, air, bread, sea, fish, joy. . . . The kingdom is like these things; the kingdom is found in these things. . . . For earth is where the seeds of heaven are sown.”

I am in awe of seeds. Every year on the farm we would plant a few pickup truck loads of seeds and spend all summer harvesting thousands of wagon loads of seeds. Haylage, corn silage, corn, barley, hay, and straw filled the mow of our barn and four towering silos to feed 200 animals for a year. In addition, these plants produced seeds to feed the livestock of the future.

Mark 4:26-34 NLT “Jesus said, “The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, while the farmer is asleep or awake, the seed sprouts and grows, but they do not understand how it happens. The earth produces the crops on its own. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. And as soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle, for the harvest time has come.” “How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story should I use to illustrate it? It is like a mustard seed planted in the ground. It is the smallest of all seeds, but it becomes the largest of all garden plants; it grows long branches, and birds can make nests in its shade.” Jesus used many similar stories and illustrations to teach the people as much as they could understand. In fact, in Jesus’ public ministry he never taught without using parables; but afterward, when Jesus was alone with his disciples, he explained everything to them.”

I am in awe of trees. My favorite tree is a sequoia which grows for thousands of years and hundreds of feet tall. Sequoias grow from a seed the size of a pin head.

Hear again Jesus’ parable this time from The Message translation. **Mark 4:26-34 MSG** “Then Jesus said, “God’s kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a person who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows—the person has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without their help: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. When the grain is fully formed, they reap—harvest time! “How can we picture God’s kingdom? What kind of story can we use? It is like an acorn. When it lands on the ground it is quite small as seeds go, yet once it is planted it grows into a huge oak tree with thick branches. Eagles nest in it.” With many stories like these, Jesus presented his message to them, fitting the stories to their experience and maturity. Jesus was never without a story when he spoke. When Jesus was alone with his disciples, he went over everything, sorting out the tangles, untying the knots.”

Recently, I have been thinking about seeds planted. As a child and youth, Reverend Everhard planted seeds in me. He enjoyed playing horseshoe. My Dad and I played horseshoe with him several times. Every time we played, Reverend Everhard planted a seed when I would throw a horseshoe close enough to get a point. Saying something like, “Even though you did not get a ringer you are close enough to get a point.” Even though none of us live life perfectly, God’s grace makes up the difference. By God’s grace all people are loved, united, and will enjoy everlasting abundant life. Years later, God called me into ministry to plant seeds of grace. Reverend Everhard often challenged me to a game of ping pong. He had a booming laugh and always had a joke. Reverend Everhard planted seeds of joy in me.

Now that Spencer and Abigail are both graduated and adults, it is a joy to see the seeds that Leslie and I have planted in them. To see the ways they have taken our love and goodness and made it their own and grown our loving goodness.

The kingdom of God is you as the good, joyful, gracious seeds others have planted in you grow and flourish. The kingdom of God is you as you plant good, joyful, gracious seeds in others.

The psalmist sings, **Psalm 92:1-4 NLT** “It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to the Most High. It is good to proclaim God’s unfailing love in the morning, God’s faithfulness in the evening, accompanied by a ten-stringed instrument, a harp and the melody of a lyre. You thrill me, Lord, with all you have done for me! I sing for joy because of what you have done. The godly will flourish like palm trees and grow strong like the cedars of Lebanon. For they are transplanted to the Lord’s own house. They flourish in the courts of our God. Even in old

age they will still produce fruit; they will remain vital and green. They will declare, “The Lord is just! God is my rock!”

The kingdom of God is like a seed. Jesus’ stories about ordinary people in ordinary situations by God’s grace yield outcomes that are counterintuitive, surprising, extravagant. In today’s story a person throws a seed then forgets about the seed. It is a shocking story, because usually the seed is planted in prepared soil, weeded, fertilized, water, tended, nurtured, and harvested. Jesus seems to be illustrating that every carefree expression of love, every shared moment of joy, every single act of goodness will grow, and produce exponentially more love, joy, and goodness. God’s grace produces wonders beyond our grandest dreams.

In a month, the York family will be traveling to Mount Rainier. A place where God has grown an abundance of flowers, so stunning it is called Paradise. A place where the Grove of the Patriarchs, massive trees thrive along a pure river.

I wonder if Jesus is inviting you, me, and everyone to be carriers of grace? To live, as we are created, in the image of God, to create paradise. To live in synergy with the earth, drinking in purity and coming together in a grove, a community, where all are loved, abundance is shared, and all thrive.

Happy Fourth of July. We can debate exactly what seeds our founding fathers planted. I presume these founding fathers got about half of their great seed ideas from our founding mothers. Some of the seeds they planted were not beneficial. Today as a country we have our problems and challenges. Can we all agree on some seeds that our founding parents planted that have grown into wonderful characteristics of our country? It seems to me that our founding parents planted seeds of grace to be a country where all enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This weekend is a time to give thanks for the good, joyful gifts we enjoy, a time to join in graciously planting good, joyful, loving seeds.

On June 14, 2009, Pastor John Buchanan preached on planting seeds. John said, “When someone plants a seed, God’s kingdom comes by God’s mysterious power, the power of love. It is like a seed, dropped into the ground, growing, and bearing fruit. It is like a young tutor, sitting quietly, week after week, with a student, doing math and grammar and wondering whether anything is happening. It is like a small loan of \$100 to a woman in Mozambique from Opportunity International to buy a sewing machine to make clothes to sell to feed her children. It is like a group of American church people building a house in Honduras, digging a well in Kenya, dispersing AIDS medication in Cameroon. It is like a Sunday School teacher patiently loving little ones, a public school teacher who stays after hours to be with her junior high students, a coach who nurtures growth in their players, like a parent who sees more in their child than anyone else and will never give up on them; God’s kingdom on earth comes, Jesus said, when seeds are dropped onto the ground.”

The kingdom of God is like our youth joining together with New Life and Trinity to learn, serve and grow, tending community gardens, making sandwiches for the hungry, listening to the oppressed to join in establishing a country of equality, practicing regenerative agriculture, and learning from our Native Americans. Like a congregation that in September will join together on the third Sunday of the month to do Hands-On Mission. Like generous, gracious servants who build houses in Haiti and educate children in Niger. Like a congregation that opens its building to El Shadai New Hope Ministries, Scouts, 12-step groups, Faith Christian Home Educators, and a variety of community groups. Like a congregation that has been blessed with generous seed planters since 1887 and is continuing to plant seeds of grace.

Pastor John said, “Sometimes the seed that is planted in the human heart is of a dream—a dream of a better world, a dream of peace, and sometimes the seed is planted so well that it takes root and grows and stubbornly refuses to die even in the face of obstacles, hurdles, and what look like overwhelming odds. Not only “Yes, you can pass the test, make the team, graduate on time; yes, you can be a doctor, a lawyer, a homemaker; yes, you can succeed” but also “yes, there can be justice and kindness in our society, and yes, there can and one day will be peace.”

In June of 2009, the Chancellor of Germany, the President of the United States, and a Nobel poet, author, and concentration camp survivor stood where there once was a concentration camp; a place that represents perhaps the most powerful intolerance and monstrous evil in all of history. All three of them spoke about the dream of peace. They recalled how Jewish adults protected the children, hid 900 of them. They held illegal classes for the children, urged them to make plans for their futures, urged the children to think about the impossible: the dream of freedom, justice and peace, a day when they could live and become and grow and bear fruit. A seed planted, right there in the foul soil of a concentration camp. One of those children who did survive was standing beside these world leaders. He spoke slowly, deliberately, about his father, who died in the bunk below his own. He spoke about the miracle of a Jew standing beside the Chancellor of Germany in front of a concentration camp. Filled with hope he spoke of a world where people stop hating and view every war, every act of violence, as absurd. The future is abundant with new beginnings, filled with promise and infinite hope.

Sometime, somewhere, someone planted a seed in your heart, dropped the seed of a dream of what you could be and do into the soil of your soul: a teacher, a coach, a friend, a parent. Sometime, somewhere, someone planted a seed of what you might believe and do and give and love: a dream of a world of compassion, equality, sharing, peace, joy, love and abundant life for all, a seed of God’s kingdom on earth and your part in it.

The kingdom of God is you as the good, joyful, gracious seeds others have planted in you grow and flourish. The kingdom of God is you as you plant good, joyful, gracious seeds in others. God is inviting us to be carriers of grace, to grow every good seed into a plant that will yield fruit more spectacular than our grandest dream. Amen.

