

## Sermon 5.9.2021

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

O heavenly Father, we ask you to bless our agrarian, fishing, gardening, and rural life on the Eastern Shore that the crops we reap, the methods we use to protect our waterways, the seeds we sow, and the small acts of kindness we plant in our communities may sprout big harvests for the purpose of growing the Kingdom of God on earth. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Please have a seat.

Good morning on this Sixth Sunday in Easter which is also known as Rogation Sunday. Rogation Days are the three days of prayer and fasting especially devoted to asking God's blessing on agriculture and industry prior to the feast of Ascension, the 40<sup>th</sup> day after Easter Sunday. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Bishop Mamertus in Vienne, France originated Rogation Days to introduce days of fasting and prayer to ward off threatened disaster. In the United States, Rogation Days have been associated with rural life and with agriculture and fishing.

Jesus liked to fish, and He would often go out with His disciples to fish. He understood the agrarian and fishing culture of those small villages by the Sea of Galilee. He would often illustrate the Kingdom of God through the use of such culture.

Today's Gospel in Mark gives us a parable of comparing the kingdom of God to that of a tiny mustard seed which is among the smallest of all the seeds on earth. "It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade" (Mark 4:31-32; NRSV).

Plant a tiny mustard seed and it will grow to a height of eight to ten feet in a short time. Its growth to maturity requires some watering, lots of sun, and tender loving care. So, why is the Kingdom of God compared to a tiny mustard seed? Due to its broad set of bushy leaves, birds can nestle within its branches, shady places can be provided, and food can become less bland with some savory flavor.

If a tiny mustard seed can give so much, then what about a small step of faith to build the Kingdom of God? The Eco-Justice branch of the Micah Ministry had this vision to grow a rain garden that would capture the runoff of hard surfaces, conserve water, filter pollution, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, and create a habitat for birds and butterflies. Good stewardship begins with a vision and then continues with loving care. God's creation requires much loving care. The Kingdom of God begins with our God-given responsibility of stewardship over God's creation which requires our devotion to God and our service to Him. One small idea can lead to a big ministry as has occurred with the Eco-Justice branch of our Micah ministry.

Ministry is the alignment of God's wisdom with our ideas and vision for the stewardship of God's creation. In our Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy, God clearly calls us to obey His commandments to love and serve Him as a condition to reap a good harvest. Obedience to God leads to an abundant harvest. Good stewardship and obedience are synonymous, because from an agrarian and gardening perspective, without diligence in crop rotation, soil nutrients, watering, and pruning, the crops and plants will not have proper growth.

Growth in ministry leads to growth in the Kingdom of God. A tiny mustard seed goes a long way with proper care as does a small act of kindness that can grow into a bigger ministry. Mother Teresa once said, "Three things in human life are important: the first is to be kind. The

second is to be kind. The third is to be kind.” In 2010, the film “A Small Act” follows the true story of Chris Mburu who was the top student in his Kenyan village, but with no money for school fees, he had little hope of a future. Then, a stranger named Hilde Back from Sweden sponsored his early education through a “sponsor a needy child” campaign. She paid about \$15.00 a term to keep Chris in school. Little did she realize then that her tiny contribution would pave the way for Chris to one day graduate from Harvard Law School. Today Chris is a human rights officer for the United Nations. He has founded his own educational sponsoring foundation named after Hilde Back to help children in Kenya to succeed. Mother Teresa also said, “Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time, and always start with the person nearest you.” That quote illustrates what Hilde Back did for Chris. She did what she could do with what she had been given. She illustrates good stewardship for us. God wants us to be His partners in His creation. He calls us to be good stewards. Stewardship preserves God’s creation and honors our Creator. Stewardship is the carrying out of our Baptismal Covenant to give respect and dignity to all creation.

Today is also Mother’s Day when we honor those women who have made a difference in our lives. My mother was a Girl Scout Leader who loved nature. I recall one Easter morning when she awoke me early to see a sunrise. She loved the smell of pine trees and would insist on keeping our Christmas tree, usually a Douglas fir, for as long as we could. She was generous to others. Motherhood is a special calling, and when God blessed Larry and me with two children, we knew that our most important vocation would be to raise them and teach them how to live out their Baptismal Covenants. Motherhood is the stewardship of God’s beautiful children.

On this sixth Sunday of Easter, Rogation Sunday, and Mother's Day, we continue to celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, ask for God's blessing to our land, and give our gratitude to our mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and any other woman in our lives who have helped us to grow up in recognizing ourselves as made in the image of God and who have helped us to scatter the seeds of God's love to grow our communities.

When the psalmist says that God has numbered and named all the stars, he suggests that God cares deeply about His creation. God desires us to care deeply about His creation. Let us take small steps by reducing the carbon footprint, planting more gardens, preserving our land, caring for our animals, and loving each other. Amen.