

One of my favorite movies of all time is “Oh God.” It is not only funny and enjoyable, it reveals a thoughtful consideration of theology and a keen insight into modern religious life. In one of the final scenes, God, who is caricatured by George Burns, and Jerry, the assistant supermarket manager to whom God is revealed, played by John Denver, are discussing the success of their mission in the world. Nobody seemed to listen to the message God told Jerry to deliver. Jerry thinks they failed. “We blew it,” he says. But God doesn’t see it that way. “Oh, I don’t think so,” God says. “You never know; a seed here, a seed there, something will catch hold and grow.”

Jesus likens this botanical process of a seed taking root, growing, and maturing, to the Kingdom of God. The principle involved is that of trust – a trust that the process of the coming of God’s Kingdom on earth will work!

This principle of trust is a hard thing for us to learn. We’re a little bit like the child who planted a seed and then dug it up every day to see how it was doing. We want to hasten the process and are frustrated by the mystery of it. We want results. We want them now and we want them big.

Actually, all our lessons for today register transitions of one kind or another; historical, political, theological, and personal. The old comes to an end; something new is beginning.

We are reminded that the providence of God is behind the process of sowing and reaping.

There was a time when many prominent theologians and ministers spoke of the Church’s task as that of “building the Kingdom of God.” This kind of thinking led us to believe that if we could just get everybody educated, everything would be finally fixed. On the one hand, this school of theological thought prompted major advances in the field of public and private education. Major universities were established, community colleges sprang up across our country, and students were challenged to gain as much formal education as possible. I’m a beneficiary of this movement. I am the first person on either side of my family to graduate from a university with a bachelor’s degree, the first to earn a master’s degree, and the first to earn a doctorate. But, on the other hand, we have discovered that education is not the key to the Kingdom. We have failed to build the Kingdom of God on earth.

The first parable of Jesus in our Gospel lesson today is supposed to help us understand that the coming of the Kingdom is to be more a matter of growth than a construction project. Jesus sowed the first seeds. We are to continue to sow those seeds...in evangelism, in Christian formation, in works of justice and mercy...and, we are to tend to the field, cultivating it, watering it, and nurturing it. But only God holds the key to its growth. The mystery of the growth of the Kingdom of God lies in the Heart and Mind of God.

That’s very good news for me. It means that I do not have to play God. The future of the world is not in my frail hands but in the hands of God. I am to do my part in God’s plan but the miraculous, mysterious growth of God’s Kingdom lies beyond my power and control. You and I have to let the seed do its own thing! There is a time to cultivate, a time to plant, a time to tend, and a time to back off and allow the seed to grow. We have enough to do without trying to do God’s job. There is a

mission field out here and it begins at our doorstep. Maybe some of us have trouble getting started because we think we have to take on more than God is really calling us to take on.

Not long ago, a friend of mine told some people in a group we were with, “Ron’s gone out there to convert those people that don’t come to his church.” I said, “No, I’ve gone out there to introduce those people to Jesus Christ. When they get to know him, he’ll do the converting and he’ll do it his way in his own good time.”

Jesus’ parable tells us that we are to plant the good seeds of God’s transforming, redemptive, unconditional love in the fertile soil of the lives of the people around us and let God take care of the process. “A seed here, a seed there, something will take hold and grow.”

We are also reminded today that we must trust God.

I often think we need to replace the word “faith” with the word “trust” in our vocabulary in order to keep from getting confused. This morning, I am not speaking of faith as an abstract philosophical concept theologians sit around in ivory towers and ruminate about. I am not speaking of a set of doctrines or concepts or beliefs.

I am speaking of faith as a verb. Faith is something you DO. Faith is trusting God enough to act on what you say you believe. Jesus used the horticultural analogy of the tiny mustard seed to illustrate the power of even a tiny amount of faith. In the realm of nature, there are many such illustrations.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh, in her book *North to the Orient*, tells of the oriental symbolism of trees. The bamboo stands for prosperity. The pine tree means long life. The plum trees suggests courage. Mrs. Lindbergh asked a friend why the plum tree stood for courage. The answer, “Because it puts out its blossoms while the snow is still on the ground.”

To be of good courage, to use the language of Paul, is to take action on what you say you believe about God and the life God calls you to live. Natalie Sleeth wrote a hymn that expresses this truth.

Faith, while trees are still in blossom, plans the picking of the fruit;
Faith can feel the thrill of harvest when the buds begin to sprout.
Long before the dawn is breaking, faith anticipates the sun.
Faith is eager for the daylight, for the work that must be done.
Faith believes that God is faithful: God will be what God will be!
Faith accepts the call, responding, “I am willing, Lord, send me.”

Now, that doesn’t mean it’s always easy. If you really believe that prejudice is an obstacle to the seed sowing, growing, harvesting process of God’s Kingdom, then you have to not only work to eliminate prejudice in others, you have to overcome it in yourself. If you believe God supplies the resources to get his job done, then you have to commit yourself, your own resources to God and trust that God will never let you run out. If you believe that God wants you to help take care of his

creation, then you'll have to think twice about leaving on a light or driving a gas-guzzling automobile. Faith means believing God, trusting God, enough to do something about it in the process God has established for the growth of God's reign on earth. We don't have to do God's job, only ours. "A seed here, a seed there, something will take hold and grow."

There are signs of hope and encouragement if we will look for them through eyes of faith.

It is easy to be filled with doom and gloom if we look at people and the world situation only through the eyes in our heads – or perhaps the eyes of the talking heads on our news programs. But God gives us a different set of eyes – the eyes of faith. Through these eyes, we are to discern the new creation emerging all around us and that is to be a source of joy.

I am thinking of several who have come seeking spiritual direction during turning points in their lives. Some have postponed or abandoned their quest. But there is still hope because the seeds have been sown. God is silently but powerfully working in their lives. Others have moved ahead and are now helping others. God's results are seen more quickly in some.

A couple, who after having failed in previous marriages and after having decided never to marry again, come to seek guidance for their lives for they have fallen in love – miraculously – with one another. One who is facing life without a mate finds consolation and courage to carry on in the support of Christian friends and God's touch upon his life. Another who is ill is restored to health again against the odds. A youth is enabled by the power of God to overcome the peer pressure he feels at school and confront his friends about the drug abuse that is destroying the minds their school is trying to train. A person with a missing piece in his life discovers that God's love is exactly the right shape. The blind see, the lame walk, the ears of the deaf are unstopped. Signs of the Kingdom, imperceptible if you are looking for something only through the eyes in your head.

I am thinking of those who have gone before in this parish who brought new life to their neighbors in Ashland in concrete ways. I am also thinking about those new things you are about to embark upon when your new rector arrives. I am thinking about couples who are faithful and courageous enough to take on the responsibility of bringing children into the world and being role models for them. I am thinking of those who are working in all the ministries of this parish so that seeds are being planted. I am thinking of those whose lives God has been touching in ways that lets them no longer fear faithful and generous stewardship. "A seed here, a seed there, something will take hold and grow."

I know. Sometimes, when we look at things as the world sees them, we feel discouraged and hopeless. We see the great successes of others and feel that our little results are insignificant and trivial. But good friends, the good news is that when we do what God is calling us to do for God and our neighbors, our labor is never in vain. God is at work, silently, sometimes imperceptibly, in the mystery of growth, bringing about the new creation. We are to be faithful, diligent, patient, and to trust God to BE God. We are going to be planting lots and lots of seed around here. Let us never be afraid to plant seeds because God is working his purpose out and because God is, something will indeed take hold and grow in the fertile soil of human lives.