

June 13, 2021  
The Third Sunday after Pentecost  
Lectionary 11, Year B  
Mark 4:26-34  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA  
Zoom Worship During the Coronavirus Pandemic  
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

What's happening, when you can't see what is happening.

Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground and would sleep and rise night and day and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how" (Mark 4:26-27)

This parable is about things that are happening when can't see what is happening.

A seed is sown, scattered on the earth, and in the silence and the darkness of the earth, life unfolds, and pushes its way through the soil. People walk by, walk past, even walk over the places where the seed was sown, where this mysterious process is taking place, and they don't even know that it is there, right next to them, even under their feet, life is unfolding, reaching upward, moving through the earth, toward the light. And someday it will be seen by human eyes, but in the meantime, people might be wondering, is anything happening, did life or death prevail?

Jesus said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 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 4:30-32).

This parable is about the potential of small things to bring forth big results. A seed is sown, another seed, a different seed, a tiny seed, sown on the ground, and yet, when the seed grows, again with unseen processes in the silence and the darkness of the earth, it spreads and creates beauty and food and shelter for the birds of the air, for the creatures of the earth. It is another story about things that are happening when you can't see what is happening.

Today's worship service is like today's parables. It is about things that are happening, even when you don't think that anything is happening. It is about small things that grow into big things, to give life and refuge and hope.

Today we have welcomed John and Judy Gear into membership at Emmanuel. They have been with us for a long time, worshiping with us, serving with us.

When you return to Emmanuel's building, you'll have John to thank for the beautiful new light fixtures that can be found throughout our building, and for his help with so many other improvements throughout the building.

Judy has been a part of our Stewardship Team and our Quilting Ministry, the Piecemakers.

The seeds of faith that were planted long ago in these two servants of Christ have found nurturing soil and ways to flourish as a part of this congregation, this faith community, and today we have heard their promises made in their hearts long ago and shown in their committed work with this congregation, spoken aloud, brought into the light in their public profession of faith and fellowship.

The 2020 Lutheran World Relief quilting season was brought to an abrupt end by the Covid-19 lockdown, with quilts left hanging in Kask Hall and draped over pews in the Sanctuary and quiltmakers turned into mask

makers for a time. No one knew, back in March 2020 when that year's quilts would be finished or when the Piecemakers would be back together in Kask Hall putting quilts together for people, for communities in need around the world.

Behind the scenes, the quilts from 2020 were boxed up and sent to Lutheran World Relief and the unfinished quilts were taken to people's homes until the day when people would be able to gather again to finish them.

Days, weeks, months, even a year went by, but during that time faithful quilters were busy, unseen, sewing squares, preparing backs, piece by piece, quilt by quilt, until this April, more than a year after the 2020 quilting season ended, and the quilters were chased out of the building by the virus, they were able to gather in our building again, masked and distanced, to start putting quilts together. There were so many quilt tops made, more than 150 quilt tops, ready to be put together, tied together with backs and batting and hemmed, so that they can be sent to those who need them.

On April 10<sup>th</sup>, the unseen work of quilters throughout this congregation was brought to light and today, we were able to bless the fruit of that labor, that harvest of 109 finished quilts, with another quilting season to come in 2021. As it turned out, 2020 was not lost quilting time. It was simply time for the harvest to be prepared, and so many will find rest, will find warmth, will find shelter in that harvest.

For our 2021 graduates, at whatever level they graduated from this year, the 2020 school year also took an abrupt turn. It did not come to an end, but, for the most part, they were sent home, to struggle through their education as well as they could, cut off from daily interaction with teachers and classmates, cut off from extracurricular activities that they enjoyed, sent

into isolation, and yet still expected to get an education. To make their way, to learn and to grow in an educational system that was created as they journeyed through it.

For our high school graduates, the story of their junior and senior years is the story of the pandemic, and from one moment to the next the ground in front of them kept shifting, the landscape of their education kept changing. But these students, all of these students, persevered. Seeds were planted and grew and, in their graduations, which we celebrate today, we see the fruit of their efforts, not to give up, even though they might have felt in these last years, that they were struggling in the darkness, underground, not exactly knowing where the light was or if they would see it.

Today we celebrate that, in spite of it all; all of the challenges that they have faced, all of the things that they lost, in spite of all of things that didn't happen for them in the past year and a half, they still have emerged from this time, into the light of accomplishment against the odds, into the light of next things, growing into the promise of the future.

As you all hopefully know, my one-month sabbatical begins tomorrow. Your blessing and sending of me will be the final act of today's worship service. And that will be like a seed planted. Because I will be away from you for a while. Our work will be separate. I won't be here to see it, but you will keep worshipping faithfully, keep praying together, keep getting our church building ready for its formal reopening, keep serving each other, keep loving one another, and, I humbly ask, keep praying for me.

And you won't see me for a while, but I will be like a seed resting in the earth, soaking up the nutrients of the word, listening for God's voice, worshipping faithfully, resting so that I can grow, being nourished so that I can

bring nourishment, listening so that I can speak with truth and conviction, and experiencing shelter in God's care, so that I can offer God's healing embrace to others.

Today's parables, today's whole worship service remind us that God often works in stillness and silence and mystery and in ways that call us to trust, for we walk so often, by faith, and not by sight. But today's service also reminds us that no matter what we can see, no matter what it looks like, God is always working, and sometimes like today, we get to celebrate, we get to see the fruit of that working.

Today's parables are about the things that are happening, the work that God is doing, even when you can't see what is happening.

And today's service, of blessing, of welcome, of celebration is that too. Thanks be to God. Amen.