

Here's stuff you ask your mom: "What's for dinner?" "What time is it?" "Why not?" "How come?" "When is it my turn?" "Can I have more?" "Where is it?" "Will you read this to me?" "Can I watch TV?" "Can I play with this?" "Do I have to go to bed?" Stuff you ask your dad: "Where's mom?"

And here's a piece from Brian Doyle, one of my favorite writers, which is appropriate for today. He writes: "WHAT AM I DOING HERE? Dishes, mostly. And gobs of laundry. You wouldn't think 3 kids would have so much laundry, I mean how many shirts can 3 kids possibly WEAR, it's not like we live in the Arctic and they have to have 20 layers of fabric so they can go trap wolverine for spending money or whatever, but you don't know THESE kids, these are their MOTHER'S kids, and thus genetically far more attentive to graceful appearance than their dad, who looks like a dissolute wolverine. THESE kids are apparently ornate musical productions with lots of costume changes, and the way they clean their rooms on Saturdays is to shovel all the clothes on the floor down the laundry chute at the bottom of which is their father, roaring.

"But I asked for these children, I begged for them, I prayed and yearned and was thrilled and delighted when they emerged from my wife one after another like a circus act, and I wrote lyrical sentimental muck about them when they were little and cute, and now they are lanky and sneering in ways I could never have imagined, I cannot retract the vows and oaths I swore when they were born, which were that I would expend every ounce of energy and creativity to be their most excellent and attentive dad, which I have tried to be for 15 years, with middling success and a stunning amount of laundry and roaring. I got exactly what I asked the Coherent Mercy for, which was the chaos and hubbub of children, who are the most extraordinary creatures of all, and I have often thought that what I am here for, if I can get over the whole laundry problem for a minute, is them. Also, I have often thought that the Coherent Mercy has a dark and devious sense of humor, and clearly relishes irony, and often gives you exactly what you asked for, which is more than you knew you wanted." (GRACE NOTES, p. 143) HAPPY FATHER'S DAY to all of you who know that privilege!

OK, down to homiletic torture, which is what YOU asked for, which you know is going to be more than you wanted! I just want to make sure you get your money's worth! We have a lot of images of growing things in our readings today. Ezekiel and the apostle Paul share something in common – they have been uprooted and find themselves trying to make a living in a place that doesn't feel like home. They're farmers in foreign lands. They have accepted the planted seed and word in their lives, and their assignment is to do the same in a world that feels more like an exile (2 Cor 5:8). Paul writes to the Corinthians that they are away from the Lord as exiles in this world. Ezekiel uses the same imagery to encourage the Israelites. They're deported to Ancient Nippur, waiting for salvation.

Jesus then uses seed planting and sprouting images to illustrate the kingdom of God. Jesus says the kingdom of God can sprout right where we are and yield a harvest of righteousness so large that the birds of the air will nest in the shade of its branches.

The setting of a farm for illustration purposes was a common practice in the ancient world. In this example, a slave, presumably captured in war from a foreign enemy, works on a farm. The slave knows very little about the land, and most likely has inadequate tools to accomplish the task. So much was out of his hands. He rises night and day, does his daily activities, and wonders if anything will ever happen. The farmer doesn't know HOW but believes something WILL happen. He has patience with the timing of the soil and the plant itself. He has faith that the wheat will sprout and ripen as he walks through the fields. The grain will tell him when it's time for the harvest; when it does, he will be ready to gather it in.

Jesus uses this parable as a picture of farming in God's kingdom when we feel as if we're living in a foreign land. Our world changes at an astonishingly fast pace. Even at 20 or 30 years of age, we have witnessed huge changes. For those of us over 50, 60, 70, at times it feels like we are living on another planet. We have to ask grandchildren to show us how to deal with our electronics. The ground underneath feels like it has shifted. It's easy to feel helpless, exiled. What then is our responsibility in the process? We've heard the adage: "Bloom where you're planted." Jesus says, "Sow where you're transplanted." Stay put. Don't be in a hurry to move on. We need to make our contribution where we are, in this moment. Our world may feel as if we've been uprooted and placed in a foreign land. But God remains with us and never abandons us. We may not know what will happen, but as Paul writes to the Corinthians, we walk by faith, not by sight.

Second, this kind of spiritual farming by faith is a collaborative process. God works with us and the earth, even when we feel like we are completely out of our element. We sow by faith, and he grows and harvests. God gives us the seed needed to accomplish the work He wants us to do. God's word already bears fruit in our life; that's why we are here in church at this very moment. But now God wants us to sow His seed into others' hearts. We do that through our work, words, and daily living. We walk through the fields of our offices, places of work, homes, armed with what seems like such little seed to sow in the lives of others. Our work might not be very noticeable to others and have little immediate success. So, how do we persevere? How do we keep on keeping on? We have to always remember that GOD is the Lord of the harvest, and it is only through His guidance that any good thing will happen.

What should we expect to happen? Take a look at the seed. The seemingly small and insignificant things we do are like the mustard seed burying deep, growing secretly in the soil. But with time and God's work, we can count on something to happen – even in a foreign land. That foreign land is going to work as well. The text gives us a little clue about how the earth where we are planted works. According to Mark 4:24, "The ground produces fruit of its own accord." The Greek word for "of its own accord" is the root of our English word 'automatically.'

We all know that nothing is 'automatic' in life or God's kingdom. But once we trust the seed of God's word into a good and open heart, the soil works with God's help to fulfill 2 promises we will see in our lifetime. First, these seeds we plant and the growth the earth causes today will also cause US to flourish. WE will benefit spiritually from our faithful sowing, our faithful loving, our faithful serving. Our own hearts are growing as we try to sow good seed around us. (adapted from GRACEWORKS, 16 June 2024, p. 9-10) We are maturing in holiness when we focus on helping and serving others, rather than our own needs and wants and desires.

Third, we have to always remember that LOVE IS STRONGER THAN HOPE! Our great mistake is that we tie hope to outcome. (Cynthia Bourgeault) Theologian Brian McLaren suggests a continuing source of hope not dependent on the outcome. GOT THAT? We keep on going even when there seems to be no productive outcome.

So often, if we can see a likely path to our desired outcome, we have hope; if we can see no possible path to our desired outcome, we tend to despair. If we are unsure, whether there is a possible path or not, we might keep hope alive, but it remains vulnerable to defeat if we think that the path is closed.

But when our prime motive is LOVE, a different logic comes into play. We find courage and confidence, not in the likelihood of a good outcome, but in our commitment to love. Love may or may not provide a WAY THROUGH to a solution to our predicament, but it will provide a WAY FORWARD in our predicament, one step into the unknown at a time. Sustained by this fierce love (I love that phrase from

Jacqui Lewis), we may persevere long enough that, to our surprise, a new way may appear where there had been no way. At that point, we will have reasons for hope again. But even if hope never returns, we will live by love through our final breath.

To put it differently, even if we lose hope for a good outcome, we need not lose hope of being good people, as we are able: courageous, wise, kind, loving, forgiving “in defiance of all that is bad around us.”

Which then leads us to this very determined declaration: We will live as beautifully, bravely, kindly, lovingly as we can for as long as we can, no matter how ugly, scary, and mean the world becomes, even if failure and death seem inevitable. In fact, it is only in the context of failure and death that this virtue develops. That’s why Fr. Richard Rohr describes this kind of hope as “the fruit of a learned capacity to suffer wisely and generously. We come out much LARGER and that LARGENESS becomes our hope.” Hope is complicated. But, even if hope fails, something bigger can replace it, and that is love. (taken from daily meditation of CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION, May 14, 2024) This is how St. Paul can say that “There are in the end 3 things that last: faith, hope, and love, but the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor 13:13) So may it be for you and for me. Amen.