

The Sixth Sunday of Pentecost
A Sermon preached by
The Rev. Dr. Kyle Wagner, Rector
Christ Church, Dartmouth

July 12, 2020

Audrey Hepburn once said, “To Plant a Garden is to Believe in Tomorrow.” Over the last while during pandemic, many people have been spending time in their garden. It’s been tough to even get mulch, and topsoil. My wife and I, well, really Julie, have been spending time in our little garden of Eden. Christians can learn a great deal from God’s creation. Jesus tells us this in Matthew’s gospel.

Take an apple tree, for instance. You can count the number of seeds in an apple, but you can’t count the number of apples in a seed. Most apples contain five seeds. Many apple tree varieties produce up to five hundred apples each season and can produce fruit for eight or more years. But not all seeds become trees. The question is, what kind of environment and care will the seed need to produce?

At baptism’s for infants and children, parents promise to nurture their children in the faith. To grow an apple tree, we need water, sunlight, fertilizer, pruning, and protection from pests. In baptism, we need the participation of a faith community, receiving the word and Holy Communion, teaching the Lord’s Prayer, the creeds, the ten commandments, and a loving presence to nurture one’s life in faith and prayer.

Could we perhaps agree that we sometimes say one thing and mean another? This is also true with Jesus and his sayings in the Bible. He talks about fair wages, the relationship between an employer and employee, farming, etc. But these parables are not about that stuff; they are about God. They reveal what God is like and how God behaves.

This Sunday and next, we hear Jesus share a series of seven parables, beginning with the parable of the seeds, which, if we look closer, is a parable about the word. In our story, the crowds gather around Jesus. Because there are so many people, Jesus climbs up into a boat and rows a little offshore so that he can be seen. In one way, Jesus teaches from the midst of the sea, revealing his ability to transform the sea into life-giving water. He continues to preach, about four groups of seeds and how they “fall” on four different sorts of ground.

The seeds in the story seem to fall randomly where they will—three groups of seed fall on ground that cannot produce growth. One group of the seed falls on good soil and provides a variety of bountiful harvests. Not just one variety, but a range.

As Christians, we are called to live in the Spirit and bear good fruit. Images of growth are throughout the Bible. In the vision of the heavenly city in the Book of Revelation, the tree of life can produce twelve different fruits.

Sowing seeds. It's an ancient image, but I think it can share some truth for our lives. As humans, we have a responsibility to one another. Just take the American politicization of wear a mask in public during COVID-19. Every day, our words and actions sow seeds of one kind or another into the lives of others. The soil of our lives receives the seeds that others cast our way. Some of these seeds grow. Some don't.

Some parents, grandparents and loved ones, plant seeds of goodness in the lives of children. Teachers sow seeds into their students, hoping they will produce a commitment to learning.

Every Sunday school teacher sows' seeds, often wondering: Does it make a difference? Will the seed take root, so they will know how much love they have to give?

I'd encourage us to watch out for the seeds that God is sowing in our lives. You never know where the seed of God's kingdom will find good soil. Sometimes it happens in unlikely places.

As you may know, our parish is undergoing an important piece of work that will be vital to our future. At the direction of the parish council, we have two groups of people working on a project that will report to the council. These groups are asking tough questions. They are exploring ideas of what our church might look like over the next few years. We are exploring the question: What is our ministry? Who are we in relation to the Dartmouth community? How can our current infrastructure allow our ministries, grow and expand? These questions are not easy to answer, nor sometimes, explore. Over the next few months we as a parish, meaning everyone, will move into a period of discernment as we ask these questions as we travel down this road. The question I ask you: Are you ready? Are you up for the journey? The question we need to ask ourselves is: are we ready to scatter seed? Are we prepared to see what God has in store for us? Some of our ideas will take; others will not. But there will be a harvest, for God is good.

There will be times in our lives, and this process of Christ Church's discernment, that we may think our hearts are so hard that God's word might ever take root. We might feel that our soil is too rocky or stretched too thin for God's grace to take hold. Our own lives filled with activities might seem too thorny. But like Jesus speaking to his followers on the beach, the Holy Spirit continues to speak to us and for us.

As we navigate a world where there is so much seed scattered, we need to be a gardener. Seed is being thrown that is toxic. We need to make sure these seeds never make it to the ground. Some seeds aren't even given a chance, no matter how hard we prepare the land. As we journey down a road of parish discernment, let us be thankful for every person and every moment that sows God's seed into our hearts. And hey, while we're at it, why don't you throw some seed yourself. Be generous. Throw it everywhere. Don't hesitate. Don't judge the quality of the soil, you never know where things will grow.

AMEN.