

DARE TO BE PLANTED
The Rev. Dr. Charles D. Mayer
The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost
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Many of you have heard me speak of my mother's Pennsylvania Dutch family. My maternal grandmother was one of five children, my grandfather one of eleven, and almost all of them had large families of their own. My sisters and I spent about one month of every year in Pennsylvania as children, and we could drive along long stretches of road lined with small farms, many of which belonged to relatives. Our Livingston family reunions (the family had anglicized the name Livingston from Liebenstein) were held on the third Sunday in August every year, and we suburban Mayer kids always stood out like sore thumbs among our farm kid cousins. Our cousins could never grasp the lives we tried to describe to them, lives without herds of cattle, or chores in the field, or church on Wednesday evenings, Sunday mornings, and Sunday evenings.

It is interesting for me now, many decades later, to think about how much closer to the parables of Jesus my cousins must have felt than my sisters and I did. Parables like the two we heard today – the parables of the growing seed and the mustard seed – come directly from the agricultural world that many of Jesus' audience, like my cousins, inhabited. Both of today's stories speak to an experience that would have been central to their lives: planting seeds, watching them grow, and reaping the results. Both stories highlight the great difference between the relatively small human act of planting seeds and the extraordinary results of that planting. My cousins would have had a much better grasp of what Jesus was saying about the Kingdom of God in these parables: that God takes our small efforts and uses them to great ends. Just as we can be confident about what a planted seed will do, so too we can be confident about what God will do each time we take steps to plant something new.

We are, of course, planting something new here in our Ossining Episcopalian family. On a macro level, it is the planting of a brand-new parish. On a micro level, though, each of us is a seed contributing to what that brand new parish will look like. Jesus' audience would have known that mustard seeds grew into something more like large shrubs than trees; collectively, a group of shrubs provided shelter and room for nesting birds. So it is that each of us will contribute together to the shape of the new place that we are going to grow here.

As I've said, farmers understand the miracle of what seeds do. All of my cousins would have been very comfortable with the idea that it is God's work that changes seeds into crops to be harvested. So, as different as my sisters and I were from our Pennsylvania relatives, our relatives could see potential in people, even in us!

So it was, I suppose, that my great uncle Edward, my grandfather's brother, approached me one day when I was fifteen, out behind the shed on his farm. Some of you have heard me tell the story before. He had clearly sought me out for a moment alone; and when he found me, he said "I hear that you are considering entering the ministry." "Yes, I am," I replied. "I hope you will," he said. A friend of mine with whom I shared this story years ago said, "If I've ever heard a call narrative, that's it." I think he was right because I was certainly nothing but an unplanted seed, and Uncle Ed was a faithful man who saw something that only God could possibly bring into being. His words have been etched in my heart ever since. "I hope you will" felt like "God hopes you will." Once they were spoken, the process of planting and watering and transformation began. The process was one percent seed, one percent outcome, and ninety-eight percent God's activity along the way.

This is just exactly how God wants to work in each of our lives right now, at this juncture in the story of our Ossining Episcopalian families. As we plant the new church, what kind of seed are you, and what will you grow into? If a person with good insight into you approached you, what would he or she say they are wondering about you? What have you been wondering about, praying about, dreaming about? What is the thing that God hopes you will do?

Remember that whatever it is, however inadequate to the task you may feel, God will make up the difference. Is there a spiritual practice you have been considering taking on? God hopes you will! Is there a ministry you have wanted to be a part of? God hopes you will! Is there an innovation you have wanted to suggest? God hopes you will! Is there a course you have wanted to take, a new life direction you've wanted to follow, a gift you have wanted to share? God hopes you will!

Is there a relationship you have wanted to heal, a friendship you have wanted to pursue? God hopes you will!

In this time of planting, each one of us has the opportunity to be a part of the shape of what is to come. As we become a new church, may each of us commit to being a part of the newness. Dare to be planted where God wants you to be. As we grow together, we'll discover together the shape of what God is creating in our midst.