

Pentecost 4B: June 17, 2018: Fathers' Day

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Ezekiel 17:22-24 Despite Israel's exile by Babylon, God has a purpose for Israel

2 Cor 5:6-10, 14-17 We walk by faith, not by sight

Mark 4:26-34 Seed growing of itself; the mustard seed

A few years ago a friend of mine, Father Mike Ferrito in San Jose, learned without warning that he had to undergo surgery to remove a third of his large intestines, because of something doctors found in a regular annual exam. I visited him at the hospital to check on him, pray for him, and anoint him. I gave him one of Ruthie's blessed angel coins. He closed his hand around the coin, and told me that this really meant a lot, and he wanted to tell me why.

While he was under the anesthetic for the surgery, he had a dream that he was lying in bed surrounded by a circle of angels; and at the foot of his bed was Jesus. He said that the vision filled him with peace, a peace that 'powered' him through the pain of recovery, and while he waited to hear from the surgeon after surgery.

Father Mike told me that for years, when he visited people preparing for surgery or just having had surgery, he has offered that they may find comfort if they envision God placing angels around them to protect them. He said that he had shared that vision so many times that maybe it had been in his sub-conscious thoughts. I said that could be ONE explanation. OR, he may have always perceived the truth of the matter, and now had proof! We both decided that was the better conclusion. Things like that happen when you and I decide to live in God's Kingdom.

Jesus talked a lot about God's Kingdom. He told his disciples to proclaim to the towns they were approaching that the Kingdom of God is near. He was speaking about the reign of God in their life. He was speaking about the presence of God in their life.

My response to Father Mike's dream was a choice to claim the presence of God in his dream.

Jesus told two parables in the Gospel lesson today, both giving us glimpses of a Kingdom that his disciples could not see, but one they were called to believe in, to move into, and to invite other people to move into.

The first parable, the parable of *the self-growing seed*, says that the growth of God's Kingdom is a divine mystery; it is not straight forward cause and effect. The sower scattered seeds and left the field untended. Now any gardener knows that would not work very well (Right, Grant?). At the other extreme, our constant attention is no guarantee against disease or pests wiping out our garden. But when it comes to the growth of God's Kingdom, the growth of an abundant life, lived in the presence of God; it is not the product of our human accomplishments. It is a divine mystery, brought about by God, in God's time.

In the parable of *the mustard seed*, Jesus tells his disciples not to be overwhelmed by the size of the responsibility they are being given, even though the small size of their group, the smallness of their understanding, maybe even the size of their faith, were as small as a mustard seed. God will provide growth from whatever they bring, and will turn it into something grand.

Our faith journey involves a personal decision to put on Christ (to live in him). And that decision leads you and me to learn to look differently at the world; looking for the presence of God not in flashes of light, but in flickers of thought, dreams, intuitions, God-incidents of chance meetings, openings for making peace with someone, windows of opportunity to renew lost relationships. We learn to walk by faith, starting with small steps.

We do that with our mission work and pastoral care, to show people how we care for each other. Our hope is that the work we do will make people aware of our motive: which is to please our God and to bring Him honor through the values we live our life by.

As Paul described to the church in Corinth, we live by faith and not by sight. We do that when we act on our trust in the presence of God; for example,

- When we give whatever we can of clothing and food and money to needy people here in Hollister, the Community Food Bank, Chamberlains, Napa fire victims, the people living in storm damaged homes on St Thomas.
- When we manage our resources by making it work to have a half time priest – me.
- When we support the work of Rev Karen in the Virgin Islands.

And I am sure there are more ways coming...I'm sure God is working on other ways for us to live by faith; practicing the presence of God, planting seeds, asking God for the growth, giving God whatever we can.

And today, on Fathers' Day, we are reminded of the job for us dads in this. We should be models of faith for our families. Paul said it this way, "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage, be strong." (1 Cor 16:13)

My all of us practice the Presence: This is the Kingdom of God, here and now.  
Amen.