

“Sowing Seeds of Something Better”

Rev. David Gregory

September 25, 2022

16th Sunday after Pentecost



Sowing Seeds
Herbert Stitt

Readings

Mark 4:26-29

from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson

Jesus said, “God’s realm is like seed thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows—he has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without his help: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. When the grain is fully formed, he reaps—harvest time!”

Brian McLaren

excerpts from *Do I Stay Christian: A Guide for the Doubters, the Disappointed, and the Disillusioned*

We can, we should, we must withdraw our endorsement of white colonial patriarchal Christianity in all its forms. Yes, we must withdraw every dollar and every minute of attention we can from industrial, Theo-Capitalist Christianity as it sanctions the destruction of the earth and the exploitation of the poor. Yes, we must break free of the axial age Christianity as it incarcerates the human imagination. But no, we cannot reject the Christianity being redeemed and reborn at this historic moment through the “vastly creative spiritual insight” of those who saw the underbelly of the old dominant forms of the faith and decided not just to curse the darkness but to start lighting candles and become something better.

This week we are reaching the end of the beginning. I say this to express my hope that the time we’ve spent on Brian McLaren’s insightful and provocative book might spur us on to keep asking questions of ourselves, of each other, and of the wider community that we call the Church. As you consider your own place in what I often call the New Reformation, the challenge I leave with you is to see yourself as part of a much greater whole, and to recognize that the way of Jesus is a call to recognize our natural bent toward constant evolution, both individually and collectively. It is a call to shed the trappings of conformity, to reject the “stuckness” that the word “church” tends to conjure for us, and to stay on the green growing edge of humanity, bringing the best of what we know as “Jesus-following,” and leaving behind the worst of what Christianity has become.

The good news for this local congregation is that we are ahead of the curve. We've been "living out the questions hand in hand" for decades now. It has not always been easy. In fact, there have been times when it was downright messy. But we're here, and we've made it through many of those "dangers, toils, and snares" to find some amazing grace in the midst of it all. So the question is "What now? Do I stay Christian?" For some, the question might be "Was I ever a Christian?" or "Do I become Christian?" Will these questions even matter to me—to us—in the 2020s and into the 2030s? Or will the broader American church become so tainted with the stench of white nationalism that we'll need to call it something else in order to stay true to our vision and our values? These are the questions we will broadly inhabit in the days and years ahead, and if we can learn to do anything at this point in time, it should probably be to find a measure of contentment in not answering the questions in any final way.

As humans, we mostly hold a very short view of things. We've had decades of training through television dramas in which the problems of the world often find a solution within 45 minutes. Our smartphones give us all the information we look for in an instant. We've come to expect everything to happen in the space of a click, but when we drop our electronics for a moment and walk out into the open air, we see a very different world from the one portrayed in cyberspace. We would never approach an ear of corn in such a way. We would never expect to cultivate the ground, plant a seed, and go back the following day and find an ear of corn. When we expect instant results from our electronics, it's not just that we're impatient, but that we've come to believe that waiting for the "harvest" is an inconvenience.

Our conversations this month have not only happened on Wednesday nights during our book study. They've been happening on Thursday mornings at Stone Soup, and on Sunday mornings, too. Having been involved in all of these conversations, I surmise that we have begun to realize that the seeds of transformation that we are planting are going to be harvested in future generations. Our individual lives evolve over decades; the great reformations in human history unfold over centuries. We want to fix ourselves, fix the church, fix the government, fix our world, but this is not how it works, and deep down we know it. Homeostasis is a powerful force in the world. In the face of change there will always be pushback, the anxious effort to return things to the way they were. We call evolution a spiral because it cannot happen in a straight line. We often think in a linear fashion or even geometrically, but the universe is actually dynamic, living, breathing, moving, and constantly changing. No amount of anxious energy can keep that from happening, but anxiety can succeed in adding to the chaos.

Like some of you, I've been spending time recently with the Ken Burns series on PBS entitled "The U.S. and the Holocaust." It is an unflinching look at the seeds that were sown throughout the world that reaped a harvest of untold horror. We were taught to think of Hitler as the "evil other," the madman who for some unknown reason decided to push an evil scheme to take over the world. What I have failed to realize until now is that the seeds of antisemitism that were planted and watered in the United States actually cultivated the ground for Naziism in Germany, and to some degree fed Hitler's conviction of the supremacy of the "Aryan race." And we might as well say it: the The White Christian Nationalism we see in our midst today feeds on the power of homeostasis, the anxious pushback of people who are frightened, and leaders who whip up people's fears and inflame them to a crisis point. There have been great strides over the years—times when human rights soared in the public consciousness: civil rights, voting rights, reproductive freedom, marriage

equality, gender equality. In nearly every case, those rights are now being challenged, and in some cases taken away, or worse. In Nazi Germany, the institution of the church was not immune to this pushback against the evolution of human culture. In fact, it became a breeding ground for all sorts of evil justifications for what was going on. American Christianity is in danger of following suit, and I for one would like to “fix” that situation right this very minute. But it doesn’t work that way, does it? There is never a “once and for all” kind of answer.

We have a lot of cultivating to do. We have seeds to plant, seedlings to tend and water, and if we plant enough of them, in due time there will come a harvest of something better. The seeds we plant will eventuate in an evolved humanity, or what the gospel writers might have thought of as the “kingdom of God come near,” but the harvest will come to the generations that follow us. That’s sometimes pretty hard to hear.

We’ve been very busy worrying about the demise of our institutional churches, when we should be more concerned with the demise of the human race. The church must become consumed by sowing seeds of love in accordance with the example set by this rabbi Jesus. If we can find a measure of peace and contentment in doing that, a harvest of light and life will come to future generations.

Is contentment really such a tall order? Just ask any farmer who has spent a lifetime sowing and reaping, and he will tell you not only of his joy in a bountiful harvest, but of his deep satisfaction with the process of getting there. When I hear people say, “The joy is in the journey,” I sometimes want to strangle them. But when I step back and look at what the journey really is, I get thoroughly excited by it. The future of humanity requires a heavy lift, but like a blade of grass that patiently pushes its way through the asphalt, we will live to see the light of day, and eventually a bountiful harvest for those who come after us. Like Martin Luther King, “[we] may not get there with [them],” but we can certainly survey the promised land and take great hope that it lies before us and can be laid hold of by our grandchildren and their grandchildren. Let us sow the seeds of something better for ourselves and for them.



Moses Sees the Promised Land From Afar
James Tissot