

“The Wisdom of Seeds”
Rev. David Gregory
October 2, 2022
17th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings

Luke 17:5-6
from the New Revised Standard Version

The apostles said to Jesus, “Increase our faith!” Jesus replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

“I Don’t Know What to Call It”

a poem by Chelan Harken from *Let Us Dance: The Stumble and Whirl With the Beloved*

I don’t know what to call it
and so I call it God:
that exquisite flowering
of every piece of me
I had once relegated to the shadows
or what happens when poetry
opens its fist in my heart
setting light free.
The seed didn’t know
what to call it either,
This Song,
This Relationship,
This Thing That Led
to the exquisite unfoldment
of its own Nameless Self.
If you come up
with a better name,
let me know.
Until then I’ll call it God,
that One who moves me
to dip the cup
of consciousness
into the waters
of existence
and whispers
from every ordinary
and precious moment,
“drink deep.”



As we approach the close of our time together, I've had a desire to return to some of the core ideas underlying all the work we've done together. I have no fondness for things that are complex or convoluted. I have always preferred to latch on to a few key ideas and let them be the seeds that germinate and take root in my psyche.

There are those who really enjoy the intensity of theological or philosophical systems, and have the ability to think them through and debate them with others. I deeply admire those abilities; I've just never shared them. I prefer the bottom line. I don't ever feel like taking something simple and making it complex, just for the fun of it. I like a good mantra, or a prayer word for use in centering. There are moments of enlightenment that help us find our ground.

Church historian Diana Butler Bass has become a voice for simplicity in a confusing world. In a blog post about this week's gospel, she speaks of a "three-word theology," found in the words of the apostles: "Increase our faith." She says of these three words that they "carry emotional and spiritual weight—you can feel the disciples' longing to trust deeply, to believe more fervently. Sometimes three words are all that are needed."

If we spend any time at all with the words and actions of Jesus, we'll see a dynamic force in his life that brought about remarkable things. The women and men who followed him around the countryside were often awestruck by what they saw and heard. The gospels by their very nature contain embellishments resulting from decades of telling and retelling, but the core of them is that Jesus was a remarkable person with an intense and powerful divine connection, and he seems to have demonstrated for those who were paying attention that a different way of life was always available to them. Their three-word request was precipitated by what Jesus had just said to them. If someone offends you seven times in a day, and tells you they're sorry, you need to forgive them every time. And the disciples' reply was "Increase our faith!" This plea could have had a tone like "Give me strength!" or "Are you kidding?" Jesus took their request, though, and said, "If your faith were the size of a tiny seed, you could do anything you want. For example you could say to this tree, 'be uprooted and cast into the sea,' and it would be so."

What?! In the past, I'm certain I have approached this reading with the idea that the disciples are rather hapless in all of this, as if Jesus's use of hyperbole was meant to point out something that was lacking in them. If they could just muster up a bit more of this thing that was scarce in them, they might get over the hump of their own simplicity and start shaking things up. He had said things like, "You will do greater things than these," at times when their mouths were hanging open at something they couldn't imagine doing themselves. But today I'm wondering instead if he might have been trying to show them that the seed of such things was already planted within them. Many have taken Jesus's words "I and my Father are One," and labeled them a claim to deity, i.e., that Jesus is claiming to be one with God in a way that we cannot be. And yet on his final night, he spoke of the Holy Spirit who wouldn't just be with them, but also be "in" them. This seed of divinity wasn't the sole province of a coequal Person of the Trinity, but it was openly available, deeply planted and cultivated within the human soul.

This may sound like heresy to some, but why not come away with a simple idea instead of creating another intricate system to explain it away? "Increase our faith" probably means "We want more, please!" If I need to forgive someone who offends me over and over again, then I need to find something within me that will enable me to do that. It's not that I'm lacking the ability to do it, I'm just searching for the connection that enables me to do it.

There is always something inside of us that is reaching for more, and this is a really good thing. There's probably no greater compliment someone can give you than to say "You're never satisfied!" They might roll their eyes, but I say, GOOD! It means that you are maintaining an edge where more is always happening, where you're reaching for a new skill, a new life, a new world, that is out there waiting to come into view.

It is very human of us not to recognize the great energy of creative healing and growth that is present within us. Poet Chelan Harkin calls this energy "God" — for now. It's something she finds when she looks within:

... that exquisite Flowering of every piece of me ... poetry [that] opens its fist in my heart setting light free ... The Seed ... The Song ... The Relationship ... The exquisite unfoldment of its own Nameless Self.

"If you come up with a better name, let me know," she says. If we were to sit quietly for a minute or a week, what name do you think you'd come up with?" What is this seed within your soul, and how does it move and grow within you? Divine Spark. Animating force. Holy Spirit. Creator. Redeemer. Sustainer.

We always want more of the good stuff, and are quick to assume we need to reach for it outwardly. If we only understood that none of it resides outside ourselves, and that the seed of the divine is planted deep within. Once we begin to locate that inner seed, anything is possible, even to the point where faith erases doubt, anxiety gives way to freedom, and the world we envision comes into actual view.

The first sermon I delivered in this place was entitled "The Journey of God," and it was the story of my own recognition that the God I started with who was "way out there somewhere," was not so far away; in fact, this Divine Being not only surrounds me and enfolds me, but in actuality indwells me. So the Journey of God was my journey, my movement to the core of my own being where this seed was planted and has been growing and blossoming through no effort of my own.

Today's poem expresses our sigh of relief that we can find the words that we can find, and the names that we can name, and until we come up with a better name, "God" speaks in universal terms of that which breathes us, that which beats our hearts, that which enables us to forgive, to love, and to create, for we are in the image of that which created us.

