

A Sermon Preached by  
Fr. Edwin Smith for Proper 6, The Season After Pentecost, Year B  
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For years, I spent every spring weekend planting, fertilizing, and weeding my lawn. I looked forward to the time when I could sit back and just watch the grass grow. That day has arrived, because someone else cuts my grass, now.

In a very real sense, our Gospel lesson for today is about just that: sitting back and watching the grass grow--or rather watching the kingdom grow.

Almost every Christian denomination puts

Responsibility for building up the kingdom of God squarely on the shoulders of the individual. That is as it should be, especially in this era when people are so prone to blame others for every Mishap, mistake, or inaction.

The problem arises when focus on the responsibility of the individual becomes the only focus. Probably everyone here has been confronted at some time or another by someone who felt it their sole responsibility to bring in the kingdom of God.

I admire their enthusiasm, but their methods,

Not to mention their reason, tend to accomplish just the opposite of what they intended.

Consider the first parable in the Gospel lesson. Jesus leads his followers to understand that the kingdom grows through our cooperation with

God, not replacement of God. The farmer casts his seed upon the ground, goes about his other business, and leaves the rest to the care of the creator.

The farmer knows the rains will fall, the sun

Will shine, and the seeds buried in the ground will sprout and grow. He doesn't make any of this happen. He does not have the power to do so. He simply brings the seeds to the field, plants them, and trusts God to take care of the growth department.

That, Jesus says, is how the kingdom grows. We are called upon to plant the seed. We tell the good news. In God's time, it brings forth fruit in the kingdom.

I worked with someone who loved growing things, however, he was not content with simply planting. It would be kind to say that he

"urged" things to grow. Now, we can do that by over-watering, over-fertilizing, or over-pruning. In any case, we end up getting in the way of natural, healthy growth. The same is true Of growing God's kingdom.

One lesson we all need to learn is that we do not own the kingdom. We cannot generate or create the kingdom. It is not ours; it is God's. He has invited us to be a part of his kingdom. He has asked that we assist in planting the seed so

That his kingdom might grow throughout the world. But the kingdom is his and his, alone. We are simply those who plant. God gives the increase.

We must also learn that, while God brings the growth, we have a responsibility to be diligent in our care of the kingdom. We plant and we tend the growth.

Every farmer knows that it is only as he plows the field and tends the growing crop, keeping out the thorns and weeds, that the tender plants will have a chance to grow. That care is part of the cooperation needed for God's kingdom to come among us and to grow. Once the seeds are planted and sprout, God still depends upon his people to care for them.

The second parable about the mustard seed, has always interested me. Years ago, at summer camp, we had the students make small cards to illustrate the passage about having faith as small as a mustard seed.

Now, I admit I am not much of a farmer. I went to buy some mustard seeds for our exercise at camp. The store was having a sale on mustard seeds (i think they were five cents a packet), so I bought ten packets, those of you who have planted

Mustard have some idea of how much seed I had left over!

If mustard seed truly were faith, not just a symbol of faith, I had enough for the whole planet. They are small seed, indeed.

And that is part of the message. The growth of the kingdom begins very small. In telling the parable, Jesus knew that the smallest effort can produce a large result

All of us have either heard others say they can't do much in the church, or we have said it ourselves. The reasons given range from lack of talent to fear of talking to others, or offending them. And, it may be a fact that someone can't do much. Yet, Jesus is saying in this parable that the very smallest effort can produce something of infinite worth in the kingdom of God.

Who knows what a small gesture of friendship, word of encouragement, or kindness, has done to bring growth to another? Who knows how many people have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ because of a tiny seed planted, that took root in the heart of another, and a life was turned toward God, a soul was born into the kingdom.

John piper wrote in his book, don't waste your life, "the people that make a durable difference in the world are not the people who have mastered many things, but who have been mastered by one great thing. If you want your life to count, if you want the ripple effect of the pebbles you drop to become waves that reach to the ends of the earth and roll on into eternity, you don't need to have a high iq. You don't have to have good looks or riches or come from a fine family or a fine school. Instead, you have to know a few great majestic, unchanging, obvious simple, glorious things – or one great all-embracing thing – and be set on fire by them."

The story is told--a true story--about a church in Somerville, New Jersey. John Vredenburg was the preacher there for many years. He felt his ministry was a failure, and so did others, although he faithfully preached the Gospel. He died discouraged.

A little while after his death, there was a great spiritual awakening in that town. One sundae, two hundred came forward to the altar to accept Jesus as their. What was notable was that nearly all of those people dated their own birth in Christ from the ministry of John Vredenburgh, the man

Who thought his ministry a failure.

Nothing that we do in God's name and spirit is too small to be used in his kingdom. Who among us can measure what growth it will produce?

Everyone can be part of helping the kingdom to grow. From the least to the greatest, we can all make a conscious effort to do what we can to contribute to the kingdom of God.

We cannot create it, but we can labor in it. We cannot make the kingdom grow, but we can plant the seeds.

Another story I heard years ago was about a man

Who took a ride with a friend. The driver took him up a mountain in Vermont.

Near the top of the mountain, he noticed some six-inch high seedlings. He asked the driver when they would be good as lumber. The driver

Told him, it would take fifty years.

The man said the driver wouldn't live that long, so why had he planted those little trees.

The driver replied, "Because my grandfather planted some on the other side of the mountain for me."

Slowly, sometimes agonizingly slow, the kingdom grows. Even the smallest seed planted in hope, entrusted to God's power and nurtured by his grace, will produce growth beyond imagination.

Come; let us be about our planting.