

Today, we continue hearing the story of Samuel. Many years have passed since the people begged and called on Samuel and on God to give them a king. They did not want to listen to Samuel's warning about the consequences of focusing on personal gain and willful pride. They craved selfish goals and power over their adversaries. So they turned away from the God who had saved them time and time again, and demanded a king who would lead them successfully in battle and secure them a place in history.

Saul was chosen to be Israel's first king. He was not only strong, handsome, and stood head and shoulders above the others, but he was also a good man, honest and forthright in all his dealings. God directed Samuel to anoint him king. But in time, Saul was corrupted by the power he had as king. He began to act in his own interest instead of listening to God and following God's commandments. Despite repeated warnings from God through Samuel, Saul continued down the path of destruction. He allowed his ego to rule his decision-making, flagrantly disobeying God's instructions and God's laws. God watched with great sorrow. Ultimately, God decided Saul was no longer trustworthy of leading the people, and directed Samuel to anoint a new king whom God would choose.

In today's OT lesson we witness God's choice of young David to eventually become Israel's next king. In so choosing, God bypassed the choices that humans might have made. He did not take the oldest and wisest son of Jesse. Nor did God choose the best looking and most rugged son. Instead, God chose the youngest son, a small boy, a shepherd to fulfill his plan directing Samuel to anoint the one chosen by faith not by sight. For God's criteria are not necessarily human criteria: "the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart"

In time, David became king and a mighty nation grew. God's reign on earth took on new life through the leadership of a man, chosen as a boy, and anointed to become king. Generations later, a child was born in Bethlehem, a direct descendant of David. He too was filled with the spirit of God, and spread God's word like seeds on the wind. Those seeds carried to all corners of the earth.

That man, that descendent of David, stood among the people and raised up for them a vision of a more perfect world, one where love of God and love of neighbor superseded personal ambition and arrogance. He came from humble beginnings, and through his teaching, preaching, and way of life, people experienced God's way of love in a new way.

He spoke in parables, telling stories that surprised his audiences, ones that still make us think. He planted seeds of wisdom and faith that grew among his listeners. He opened the eyes of his followers to a new way, where all were welcomed, all were valued, and surprising things happened when they called upon God to take the lead.

OT readings give us a view of a human kingdom, where God's laws provide the framework for life. In the NT, we see the seeds of faith, truth, integrity, and justice that were planted by God so many centuries before fulfilled in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Today, Jesus tells us the Kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seeds in the garden. It seems that the farmer does nothing overt to care for the garden, but that, in time, the seeds sprout, and grow producing a crop to be harvested. This is so counter-cultural to those of us who struggle with our gardens, preparing the soil, carefully planting the seeds, watering, weeding, fertilizing, watering and weeding some more. What is it that Jesus is trying to tell us?

We know from our own gardening experiences that something miraculous happens out of our sight, underground. In the warmth and moisture of the soil, the seeds that seem so lifeless when we plant them, gradually swell, and new growth pushes out from a crack in the seed coat. Silently and in God's time, they absorb the nutrients, moisture, and warmth from the surrounding soil, and are transformed into new growth and life. How long this transformation takes, we can guess, but do not know the exact timing. However, we have faith that something will grow for this is God's way. Soon, a new green shoot emerges from the soil reaching into the sunlight. Roots reach down spreading through the dark soil to stabilize the plant. With the stem and leaves reaching upward to the light and roots reaching down into the rich soil, our plant can flourish

Maybe what Jesus is telling us, is the same thing God was telling the people when he selected David the young shepherd boy as Israel's next king. On the surface, we often don't see the miracles God is working. God chose David, the unlikeliest of Jesse's sons to be anointed as the next king. God saw in David the heart of love, even in the midst of his many human failings, that made David a great king for God's people. The seeds the farmer scattered were scattered on good soil, and placed with trust in the process of God's natural laws that bring life and growth from unlikely places when left to be nurtured in God's care.

This brings us to our charge and responsibility -- to continue plant those seeds of God's grace, tend them as best as we can, and let God's miracle of love work in every heart in the world. Even the tiniest of mustard seeds can grow into a mighty bush that spreads far and wide, like a tenacious weed.

What mighty things is God planning from the seeds we plant? We don't know for God's Kingdom sometimes grows quickly, and sometimes it lies dormant for years. God's Kingdom grows as seeds are scattered and take root. It bursts forth from existing plants that sprouted long ago, and may even appear to have died. Some worry the institutional church is dying. People quote statistics about the declining numbers of people who admit to belief in God, and the increasing number of people who no longer attend church services on a regular basis. But God's Kingdom, like the mustard plant, the most tenacious of weeds, cannot be rooted out, starved out, or poisoned out. Pour concrete for a sidewalk, and weeds will grow in the cracks. Let the earth dry, and the winds blow, yet life sprouts forth as soon as the rains come. The one who controls the growth and spread of the Kingdom ... is God. And God's work in the world is unstoppable. What is our role? Our role is to see as God sees. Our role is to do all that we can to spread the seeds of God's love and word far and wide. It takes a lot of courage to continue to scatter the seeds of God's love. It takes work. Yet our Gospel today calls us to do exactly that.

May God continue to bless us on our journey and give us the grace and to do that which others say cannot be done.