

Sermon – June 13, 2021

“Small Seed, Big Hope”

Written by: Rev. Jessica M. Townsley

Scripture: Mark 4:26-34

As you might imagine, it's hard for a pastor to get a weekend off. A few weeks ago, however, I had a weekend off between leaving my former church and coming here. That weekend, I watched a movie I hadn't seen in decades: *Sister Act*. Is anyone familiar with this film? It's about a lounge singer named Delores, played by Whoopi Goldberg, who gets tangled up with the mob and goes into witness protection as a nun. When I was growing up, this was one of my favorite films to watch when I needed a pick-me-up.

In the film, Delores takes on the identity “Sister Mary Clarence.” Delores, you must understand, is as far from nunlike as a person can be and initially plans just to hang out in her room. Out of sight, out of mind. She soon discovers that Mother Superior has different ideas. Their relationship is rather adversarial for most of the film, particularly after Mary Clarence takes an interest in the choir whose sound is... how do we say this gently? Not really as angelic as you expect it to sound. Mary Clarence is talented and believes she can make them sound a bit more choir-like, so she steps in to help lead the ladies despite the doubts of many nuns who assume that this fake nun, unspiritual as she seems, will never be able to contribute fruitfully to their work. To them, she's a nuisance rather than a blessing—that is, until they begin to find their voice. Mary Clarence may not be nunlike, but

her voice and leadership makes this rag-tag group of singers so brilliant that they sing for the Pope.

You may be asking, Pastor Jessica, what on earth does Sister Act have to do with the Parables of the seeds? Well, I'm glad you asked! As I meditated on this scripture for today, I couldn't help but think about how often in our lives, the smallest, most unexpected things end up having a big impact. Our Gospel selection today from the Gospel called Mark has something to tell us about the kingdom of God. In a series of parables involving seeds, Jesus gives us glimpses into what God's reign looks like. It is like a farmer who scatters seeds on the ground and leaves them alone to do the work they must do on their own trusting that the mechanisms behind the sowing of seeds will produce abundant growth, enough to harvest at the right time. It's not that the farmer does no work. It is that he does what he can, knowing that what's in his control is done. Trusting that, after having done his job, the seeds and the soil and the water and the sunlight will do theirs. In the same way, we as the church must trust that, having done our work—controlling the controllables, as I like to say—the Holy Spirit is doing what the Spirit does, working behind and beneath it all to bring the kingdom to fruition. It's tempting to want to force our way and get frustrated when what we want doesn't happen as we wanted it to. It's easy for us to let our anxieties get the most of us, to worry over all those little things we can't control, especially in the church. But like the farmer, we must trust the ground of being that is God. We must have faith that, having done the work we can do the best we can do it in that moment, the Spirit is ever present and working "behind the scenes" to accomplish those things that align with

the vision of a world in which all people know the love of God and love of neighbor.

We don't stop working, we do what we can do and then we "let go and let God" do the rest. We don't give up the fight for justice, for food for the hungry, for equality for the oppressed, for safety and well-being for all children, for an end to poverty, for an end to violence across the globe, for an end to racism, sexism, and bigotry—no, we keep fighting for those good and worthy causes. Justice is central to scripture and to the good news Jesus continues to bring. We don't stop working, but we lean into the faith that God is with us in that work. We do what we can and have confidence that the still-speaking God will do the rest.

In the end, what we have here in the scriptures are parables of hope. Hope that God is with us. Hope that even something as small as a single mustard seed can produce growth so plentiful that others may live their lives in the safety of its branches. Sister Mary Clarence was one person, totally unqualified to be a nun, but God gave her gifts so powerful that she was able to usher an out of tune group of women into perfect harmony. What didn't seem like much help to the work of the church grew into something so beautiful and pleasing in the eyes of God that they revived and grew their church.

This morning, we grow our church by one family. I know bigger churches have membership receptions that may be larger in number than ours today, but with the sowing of this one family seed comes hope. It is the beginning of new growth at Trinity. It is a sign that the Spirit is alive and well in this church and that we are heading in the right direction with the teachings and

ministry of Jesus as our guide and God's love and grace to surround and sustain us.

So welcome, Amy, Nathan, and Marissa. We're so grateful for your presence and for the blessing of you choosing this church to call your church home. And now, as one church, united in the love of Christ, let us welcome this family with open arms and open hearts. Let us do the work together for the kingdom of God. Let us trust that, having done that work, The Spirit will do the rest. Amen.