

Mark 4: 26-32

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Seeds, Winds, and Hope

Jesus says,

“The Kingdom of God is as if someone scattered seed on the ground and would sleep and rise, night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, and that person does not know how it happens...”

“The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all bushes (sometimes as large as a house) and puts forth large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” Mark 4: 26-27, 31-32

“[The seed] is an enduring symbol of life growing out of what seems not only small but dead,” says Presbyterian pastor Nibs Stroupe. (p 145, *Feasting on the Word: Year B volume 3*, 2009).

“The seed is an enduring symbol of life, growing out of what seems not only small but dead.”

Friends, I cannot tell you, how very much I long for the Kingdom of God. I long to feel God’s caress and care, I long to internalize God’s amazing grace so that my soul will break open, my heart be soothed and my mind stilled.

There is, in these two particular images of God’s power, a quiet certitude, and a gracious receptivity that I find almost baffling. I am a doer. Yet these stories are about God’s grace, stories about God’s power working in and around us, maybe even in spite of us. In these passages, it seems that we are not so much called to enact God’s saving grace, but rather to bear witness to it. To be alert and awake to God’s Kingdom being revealed.

I wonder if I am not the only one among us, who feels the need to do and to do and to do, rather than to spend time, being, watching, listening, and observing. I wonder if there are times in my life when I am so task-focused that I fail to see the plants sprouting, that I fail to notice that the mustard seed has broken open.

The author, Kent St. John, in the book, *Spiritual Gifts of Travel*— tells the story of a man, who allows himself to stop, to hear, and eventually to see the in-breaking of God’s Holy Kingdom in the most unlikely of all places.

St. John writes,

As I stepped out of the wine cellar and into the wind, a strong feeling of being pulled came over me: I was drawn up toward the Cathedral by an unknown source. The empty streets were soon filled with a soul-clutching sound, the vibrations swirling around in the increasing wind. The vibrations soon turned into mournful, but melodic words.

The only lights visible this cold, late February night were focused on the single-spired beauty of Strasbourg's Gothic cathedral and nothing else. The only sound was the lone voice, incomprehensible yet full of meaning.

A solitary figure in the cathedral square slowly revealed itself, clad in dark cloak and fur-topped hat, and I realized the source of the unearthly sound.

After I listened in rapture for what seemed like hours, the figure beckoned me closer. As I approached, the large bearded man smiled and offered me some of his meager refreshments, bread, and water. The voice belonged to him, to Emmanuel Michalski, and the words were Hebrew. It seems Emmanuel sings here at the cathedral to remind people of Sturthof/Natzweiler, the only Nazi concentration camp that was situated on French soil, and the 44,623 souls that passed through there.

*"Why on such a cold windy night?" I asked.
"Because of the devil, the cathedral, and the wind," he replied.*

Seeing my incomprehension, Emmanuel told me of the legend. It is said that when the devil heard about the splendors of the new cathedral he decided to see for himself. The devil summoned the wind and rode on its back into Strasbourg. When he arrived and saw the magnificent building dedicated to God and light, and not to the powers of his darkness, [when he saw this] the devil erupted with a great rage. As the devil rode the wind around and around the monumental edifice, his anger grew until he stormed off.

He was so incensed, he left the great wind behind, hoping that it would become a disruptive force for those entering God's house of worship. Three centuries later, even on a summer's day, a cold brisk wind can be felt circling just around the cathedral.

Emmanuel Michalski uses the devil's wind as a vehicle to spread works of hope, remembrance, and faith.

And so, in response to his encounter with Emmanuel, the prophetic singer, St. John decides to visit the Nazi concentration camp.

Of this visit he writes

Even knowing I could leave, a chill jolted my spine. This was to be my first visit into a world only glimpsed in movies and old newsreels.

The prisoners built the camp in atrocious conditions, the objective being to kill off most during the work. Those who [survived] were given categories:

Red for politicians
 Purple for religious believers
 Black for gypsies and nonconformists
 Pink for homosexuals
 Green for common criminals
 Yellow stars for the Jewish people...

Wandering around the compound I came upon a sign [in French] ... As I pulled out my French-English dictionary, a clutch at my elbow froze me. A small elderly gentleman asked,

“American?”

“[Yes I am american]” I answered.

“I am Mr. Muller and I will tell you what the sign says, “This is the field where the ashes of the cremated prisoners were spread,”

Suddenly, a huge sob broke the silence between us from what I assumed to be the haunted memory of family and friends who had passed through the camp.

I led his frail body to a wooden bench— as I felt all his control seep away. After about an hour, Mr. Muller mumbled some words. I tried to comfort him by telling him those he lost at the camp would be honored by his visit. Suddenly his head dropped to his chest and another cry came from deep within his body.

“I was a guard here,” he gasped.

At first, a wave of nausea came over me like a cold wind. I pulled back as if I had been struck by lightning. Then I sensed that I may have been one of the only people that this man had ever told that fact to. “What brought you back...?”

Mr. Muller, with red-rimmed eyes, told me about a cold February night when on a visit to Strasbourg he heard a mournful yet melodic voice that drew him to the cathedral. The voice belonged to Emmanuel Michalski, the very same voice that drew me in on a cold February night...

(Pp50-53 in The Spiritual Gifts of Travel: The Best of Traveler’s Tales edited by James O’Reilly and Sean O’Reilly)

Friends, we are living in a time, when we can be so overwhelmed with all that is happening, that we fail to notice, fail to see, fail to hear God’s Kingdom breaking into our world. Our tasks and maybe even our fear over all that is happening may prevent us from being and breathing long enough to hearing God.

God is alive and active all over our world, breaking forth from seemingly inert or even desperately dead places. May we, as the days get longer and longer,

may we find moments to be still, to listen and look for the God with whom we so deeply long to be united.

May we be the ones who open our lives and create the time to hear and see the world so that God's surprising presence may be revealed, In Christ's most Holy Name I pray.

Amen.