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Lent 5B
Peace, Seattle
March 25, 2012
John 12:20-33

SEED TO FRUIT, DEATH TO LIFE

Let us pray: May the seed of your Word, find its place on the good soil of our hearts, that the harvest may come when you deem it time. Amen.

Four years ago, among the Svalbard Islands, on one of the last bits of land ringing the Polar Sea, the Svalbard Global Seed Vault opened for business. It's mission: to house backup copies of all the world's food crops – 2 billion seeds in all—and to protect those seeds for thousands of years into the future.

Built on the island of Spitsbergen, the vault lies under hundreds of feet of permafrost and Arctic rock, so that even in the worst-case scenario of global warming, the seeds will remain frozen naturally for up to 200 years.

Part of an unprecedented effort to protect our planet's rapidly diminishing biodiversity, the first deposits into the vault contained 268,000 distinct seed samples–each from a different farm or field in the world. Together, they represent the most comprehensive and diverse collection of food crop seeds being held anywhere.[1]

If seed crops are lost due to natural disasters, war or simply a lack of resources, the seed collections from Svalbard will be available to reestablish those crops, to help maintain plant diversity and, ultimately, to feed the world.

> ***The Word of God is source and seed; it comes to die and sprout and grow.***
> ***So make your dark earth welcome warm; root deep the grain God bent to sow!***
> ***In the Lord let us rejoice…***[2] *(sung by soloist)*

This week the Supreme Court will hear arguments on the nation's much debated Health Care Act. Whatever your opinion on the legislation may be, we can all agree that healthcare in this country and is becoming more complex and more expensive every year.

- Healthcare workers now constitute the 3rd largest workforce in our economy, with 1 of every 8 workers having a job in healthcare.[3]
- In 1970 US healthcare costs amounted to 7.2% of U.S. economic output.[4]
- By 2010 the amount of economic output devoted to healthcare had more than doubled, and the average amount of spending per person had risen OVER 23 TIMES from $356 per person, per year in 1970 to $8,402 per person, per year in 2010.
- Crunch the numbers and it adds up to 2.6 TRILLION dollars in healthcare spending—more than the entire economic output of all but the top four countries in the world.[5]
- **By 2020 that amount is expected to climb to 4.6 trillion. Unchecked, by 2050 the percentage of our economy directly linked to healthcare is projected to reach 40%.**[6]

[1] For more about the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, visit their official website: http://www.nordgen.org/sgsv/
[2] Delores Dufner, OSB, © 1983, 1993 Sisters of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, MN, admin. Augsburg Fortress. Verse one.
[3] That does not include people who work for the pharmaceutical or health insurance companies.
[4] http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2012/03/19/148932689/health-care-in-america-follow-the-money
[5] http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2012/03/19/148932689/health-care-in-america-follow-the-money
[6] http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2012/03/19/148932689/health-care-in-america-follow-the-money

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Our society invests enormous amounts of public and personal money prolonging life.
We do everything we can, using all the technology we can, to extend life, and often with mixed results.
But today we hear Jesus say, "unless the grain dies, it cannot bear fruit."

Jesus and his apprentices have entered Jerusalem for the last time, to celebrate Passover.
Enemies both within and beyond his inner circle are scheming for his arrest, and every move he makes is under suspicion.

When an anonymous group of God-fearing Greeks comes looking for him, something like a switch is thrown, and the HOUR Jesus has spoken of since the very first week of his public ministry, the HOUR toward which his entire three-year ministry has been driving, suddenly arrives:
THE HOUR HAS COME, he announces, FOR THE SON OF MAN TO BE GLORIFIED.

Then, Jesus lifts up an image from the fields to tell those who are with him about the nature and necessity of what's about to happen, about his own impending death.

> UNLESS A GRAIN OF WHEAT FALLS INTO THE EARTH AND DIES, IT REMAINS JUST A SINGLE GRAIN; BUT IF IT DIES, IT BEARS MUCH FRUIT…NOW MY SOUL IS TROUBLED. AND WHAT SHOULD I SAY—'FATHER, SAVE ME FROM THIS HOUR'?
> NO, IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT I HAVE COME TO THIS HOUR.

A seed only fulfills its purpose when it's buried in the earth. The millions of seeds cached in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault will never fulfill their purpose or potential while they're sequestered away there in sealed, moisture-proof pouches. It's only when catastrophe comes, and those seeds are brought out from the permafrost and buried in the earth that they will fulfill their true purpose.
Because only then will they germinate, only then will they sprout, only then will they grow to produce new fruit, new seed, a new harvest, to keep humanity alive.

"Unless I die," Jesus seems to say, "my life, my way, my testimony, cannot bear fruit."
Or more simply, "The life I offer the world can only arise from my death."

> ***The Word of God is breath and life, it comes to heal and wake and save.***
> ***So let the Spirit touch and mend and rouse your dry bones from their grave!***
> ***In the Lord let us rejoice…***[7] *(sung by soloist)*

The tragic death of Black teenager Trayvon Martin last month has ignited another intense national conversation on race. Trayvon, age 17 and unarmed, was shot dead while walking from a convenience store to the home of a family friend by gunman George Zimmerman who was out on a neighborhood watch patrol. Zimmerman has claimed he acted in self-defense.

Since the incident occurred four weeks ago, Black parents across the country are having "the conversation" with their teenaged sons and laying out "the Code."

> "I thought my son would be much older before I had to tell him about the Black Male Code," writes journalist Jesse Washington. "He's only 12, still sleeping with stuffed animals, still afraid of the dark. But after the Trayvon Martin tragedy, I needed to explain to my child that soon people might be afraid of him."[8]

[7] Delores Dufner, OSB, © 1983, 1993 Sisters of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, MN, admin. Augsburg Fortress. Verse two.
[8] Read the full essay @ http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/46843826/?gt=43001&ocid=ansmsnbcrel1

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The Code Mr. Washington shared with his son, goes like this:

- Always pay close attention to your surroundings, son, especially if you are in an affluent neighborhood where black folks are few. Understand that even though you are not a criminal, some people might assume you are, especially if you are wearing certain clothes.
- Never argue with police, but protect your dignity and take pride in humility. When confronted by someone with a badge or a gun, do not flee, fight, or put your hands anywhere other than up.
- Please don't assume, son, that all white people view you as a threat. America is better than that. Suspicion and bitterness can imprison you. But as a black male, you must go above and beyond to show strangers what type of person you really are.

I don't know about you, but I never had THE TALK with my son Nathan when he was a teenager—I never had to.

Some seeds, when sown, produce only bitter fruit. These plants, once they gain a grip, threaten to steal the very life away from anything they touch. They produce only bitter fruit, and none of them is more bitter than the legacy of racism.

The roots of racism grow broad and deep; they grip the soil, they infiltrate the soul, and extricating them, so they will produce no more ill seed, no more bitter fruit, seems, at times like these, well nigh impossible.

But today's GOSPEL says, no matter how difficult it may be, it is NOT impossible.
And if we are to believe the final words of our gospel reading, we must believe that it is part of God's deepest intention to see it done.

> NOW IS THE JUDGMENT OF THIS WORLD; NOW THE RULER OF THIS WORLD WILL BE DRIVEN OUT. AND I, WHEN I AM LIFTED UP FROM THE EARTH, WILL DRAW ALL PEOPLE TO MYSELF.

ALL people. Black and white, straight and gay, privileged and forgotten.
Christ's cross gathers up us all, and set us on a new road, a new way, a resurrected life.
And if it is part of God's deepest intention, then it is part and parcel of our mission.

And we—you and me in this community named PEACE, we have been entrusted with the task and empowered by the Spirit to take that new SEED, that new way of RESURRECTED LIFE, and plant it in our homes, within our families, our schools, the places we work and eat and shop and live.
To trace it, as he has already done, on our very hearts.

The truth is, sometimes, in order to live, truly live—something within us must first die.
And so, while we're on the way, we who follow Christ, who have been yoked to him in baptism, we keep alive a certain question within us: What of me must die here, in order that I might truly live?

What of my old self must I relinquish in order to make room for a new self?
What prejudices, or fears or habits of the heart must be buried, in order for the seed of new life to take root and emerge?

"Very truly I tell you," Christ says, "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

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The promise that God leaves us with today is <u>not</u> that we shall never die.
The promise is that because of Jesus Christ, death has become the seedbed for new life.

> ***The Word of God is flesh and grace, who comes to sing, to laugh and cry.***
> ***So dare to be as Jesus was, who came to live and love and die.[9]***
> ***In the Lord let us rejoice… (sung by soloist)***

[9] Delores Dufner, OSB, © 1983, 1993 Sisters of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, MN, admin. Augsburg Fortress. Verse three.