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Proper 19B, 75th Series 1
Peace, Seattle
September 16, 2018
Gen 1:11-13, Mark 4:26-29

SOWN SEEDS

God had a dream—a dream to bring life to planet Earth, life of infinite variety, life that would be self-perpetuating, self-sustaining, and evermore complex. God had a dream, and God had a plan, and seeded plants were integral to that plan.

> God said: "Let the Earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The Earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good.

Paleo-botanists tell us those first seeded plants started appearing about 385 million years ago. But where did the building blocks for those plants come from? (Bear with me a minute…)

According to one theory gaining steam these days,[1] in the primordial recesses of deep time,[2] life was brought to this barren rock planet—was seeded here—by comets bearing space-resistant organisms whose living cells are the ancient ancestors of all life forms on Earth.[3]

Over hundreds of millions of years this continuous seeding of Earth helped set the stage for life to gain a foothold. And after the first photosynthetic cells emerged 2½ billion years later,[4] that foothold eventually flourished in an explosion of life on Earth—including the seeded plants and fruits that support and sustain our lives today.

God had a dream, and God had a plan, and seeds played an integral role in that plan—a plan which is still unfolding.

Teilhard De Chardin, the Jesuit theologian and paleontologist, wrote:
> **"Above all, trust in the slow work of God."**

Today, life on Earth as we know it is largely shaped by the activities of seed plants. From the coniferous forests of the Cascades and Olympics, to the orchards of central Washington, to the grain fields of Eastern Washington—and even in our backyard gardens—it's impossible to imagine the life we live without these life-giving and life-sustaining harvests.

Jesus wasn't a botanist, but he caught the wonder of the natural world and used images of plants in his parables:
> "The reign of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how."

And remember the mustard seed? (It's on our bulletin cover today…)
There is great mystery and extraordinary potential wrapped up in these tiny little packages.

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[1] It's known as the Hoyle-Wickramasinghe (H-W) thesis of Cometary (Cosmic) Biology.
[2] 4.1 billion years ago.
[3] Steele, E.J., et al., *Cause of Cambrian Explosion - Terrestrial or Cosmic?*, Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology (2018), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pbiomolbio.2018.03.004
[4] Roughly 1.6 billion years ago. Read more about the first plants in: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-first-plant-evolved/

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The seeds for what would become this congregation were sown by Pastor Otto and Alva Karlstrom who, with volunteers Mami Christensen and Frances Nelson Smith, came to West Seattle from Gethsemane Lutheran Church to organize Sunday School classes in the Gatewood Hill area in the early 1920's.

Of course, you can trace their missionary impulse back through their Swedish ancestors, back through Brother Martin and the Reformation with its focus on the proclaiming the gospel, back through centuries of saints and witnesses to the apostles, back to Jesus himself.

But it was THEY—Otto and Alva, Mami and Frances—who in this particular instance… (because everything of consequence begins with someone doing something somewhere!)… it was THEY who tilled the soil for what later would become the seedbed into which Peace Lutheran Church was planted.

Without their work—aided and abetted by the Holy Spirit—work focused on creating the right conditions for faith to form, we wouldn't be sitting here 74 years later.

God had a dream, and God had a plan, which took root in the lives of people who tilled the soil. And 20 years after that beginning, along came another servant of the gospel named Gladys Peterson, who was sent by the larger church to see if the soil around in this neighborhood was ready for planting.

Her answer was YES.

So on December 12, 1943 a revived Sunday School class under her leadership was held in a portable classroom building at the E. C. Hughes School at 34th and Holden.

How many people showed up that first Sunday? THREE. And three turned out to be enough.

For by the following July, the class had grown enough to justify having seminarian Neale Nelson add a worship component to the gatherings. And by September of 1944, the new mission start had gained enough momentum to call their first pastor—the newly ordained Luther Anderson.

None of this story—our story—happens without the soil being prepared; none of it happens without the seed being sown; none of it happens absent the people who committed themselves to nurturing the sprouts that emerged from the soil, until they reached their full stature (and we aren't there yet!)

Nurturing the seeds of faith continues to be a core ministry of our congregation. The seeds we sow now in the lives of our children will produce a harvest that will keep Jesus' message of abundant life visible, alive and relevant both in our time and in succeeding generations. This is why we're beginning our yearlong commemoration of 75 years of ministry on Rally Sunday…

On five Sundays over the next fifteen months we'll lift up particular aspects of our mission and ministry under the overarching theme: *OUT OF MANY – ONE*, all leading to the culminating events on the final weekend of November in 2019.

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Something about the spirit and character of this congregation—

- its openness and flexibility,
- it's vibrant nature,
- its grounding in word and sacrament,
- its resilience in challenging times,
- its capacity for welcome,
- its relational IQ,
- it's concern for people beyond these walls—

ALL of these attributes and more—make Peace Lutheran a community in which the gospel seed flourishes.

None of us invented this. It's all a gift. None of us is responsible for it alone, but we all participate in making it so as we bring our particular stories, aptitudes, talents, dreams, and convictions to the mix.

During his final week with his disciple community Jesus said, unless a seed falls into the earth and dies it cannot bear fruit.[5]

A seed only fulfills its purpose when it's buried in the Earth, for only then can it germinate, only then can it sprout, only then can it grow to produce new fruit, new seed, a new harvest.

There is a mystery in how the good news seed does it work among us, a mystery beyond our ken. There is a sense in which, as Jesus says, the seed sprouts and grows we do not know how.

God has a dream, and God has a plan, and God has invited you and me to be part of them.

We don't have to worry about the whole big picture—that's God's job. We've just been entrusted with one small part. One neighborhood, one community in which, working together, we give our all to making the conditions right for a new generation of seeds to be planted, for new faith to be formed.

This vocation we share is a sacred and imperishable trust passed on to us from the likes of Otto and Alva, Mami, Francis, and Gladys, and dozens of unnamed others through the generations.

And now it's our turn.

Amen.

[5] John 12:24