

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 12

June 27, 2008

By Diane Horst

Genesis 29:15-28 - Psalm 105:1-11, 45b - Romans 8:26-39 - Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer".

Today's Gospel readings from Matthew are a collection of parables. Parables are stories or lessons that teach morals and values. Just think, parables told over 2000 years ago continue to be as appropriate and socially current as they were when they were first told. These lessons were told in parables allowing the listener to think, interpret, and comprehend what it means to know what God wants us to do. They aren't demands or steadfast laws, but insightful, moral stories that encourage us to choose to act with love as a demonstration of our faith.

The first two parables are concerned with growth from a seemingly modest or insignificant beginning. A tiny mustard seed growing into a tree large enough to become a safe haven for other living creatures, and yeast, a tiny insignificant granule, placed in three measures of flour that has the capacity to expand and form an entire mass of dough. They can remain just what they are, or they can be nurtured and encouraged to demonstrate their God given gifts and thereby affect the lives of those around them.

A tiny mustard seed and a grain of yeast appear individually as too small to make any impression in the world, but each one opening themselves up and offering their unique gifts have the ability to initiate changes that will have a rippling effect on everything around them. So it is with each of us. We too have our own unique gifts and hidden treasures. We can hide them, "bury them in a field", or we can choose to offer them up to the service of God. This will allow them to grow and to demonstrate His glory for all around to see. They will be nourishment and shelter for others as well as shining examples of God's glory and love.

Here at St. James, we have embraced Mutual Ministry and raised up individuals from within our parish whose gifts we recognized. There are gifts in each of us that need to be utilized for the glory of God. Starting in August, there will be sessions offered on the first Sunday of every month between the 8:00 and 10:00 services designed for encouraging growth of our individual gifts. If you don't care to read the lessons during the morning service, there are opportunities for contributing behind the scenes by joining Dorothy and helping with gathering and arranging flowers, the Alter Guild is a group who are responsible for changing the linens and setting the alter, greeting visitors as ushers is another area where all are welcome to join, or you can also assist with coffee hour, and many others. There are tasks where you are visible or invisible that assist this congregation to make our parish family run smoothly without overtaxing any individual.

And in our daily lives outside of the church, we can offer ourselves in service and for God's glory. A kind word to a stranger, or even a heartfelt smile, holding the door for someone or letting the person with just a few items go ahead of you in the checkout line, or allowing another vehicle to enter traffic are all ways of demonstrating love and human caring.

How many of you have ever watched the movie Pay It Forward? It's the story of a young boy who tried to cause the world to change by doing three unrequested good deeds asking only that the recipient, in return pass forward to three more people, acts of kindness. It's a moving story of the boundless power we all have to affect the lives of others and to demonstrate God's love and compassion and carry others to him whenever possible.

Each one of us can make a difference. All of us must be instruments of faith in our community. Despite the hopelessness and negativity that are so prevalent in the world, we must, as followers of Jesus, spread the enthusiasm of the faith that nourishes us and share the strength that we receive from this faith. One person knowing the love of God can spread that knowledge to hundreds of others. One person giving love instead of hate can produce results that are similar to those of the tiny mustard seed that becomes a huge tree.

The parables in Matthew demonstrate the values and morals that God would like us to follow. It is up to us to choose to demonstrate our faith and allow the grains of heavenly yeast to ferment and grow throughout our neighborhoods and on into the world. It is like the starfish story. As a young boy walks along the beach after a storm he comes across hundreds of starfish tossed up on the sand and he bends over and tosses first one and then another back into the sea. A cynical older man comes up and asks him what he thinks he's doing. He can't possibly make any difference with all the hundreds of starfish littered about. But the little boy, undaunted, bends over, picks up another starfish, and tosses it into the sea and looks at the man and says, "I made a difference to that one."

Let us go forth today and make a difference to someone by demonstrating our faith and spreading God's love. I challenge you to do three unrequested good deeds, plant your mustard seed and allow your grains of Christian yeast to rise among others who thirst to see and feel the love of Christ. Toss out a starfish and make a difference. Amen.