

Pent3_Prop6B_061712_mcr
All Saints Episcopal Church

"The kingdom of God is as if..."

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and sanctifier. Amen.

Good morning! About a month and a half ago, I was the preacher for the Sunday when the lesson was from John where Jesus says, 'I am the vine and you are the branches.' I told you, among other things, about our garden at home, which includes a grape vine with no grapes on it, a raspberry bush with no raspberries on it, and how I learned to pick the suckers off tomato plants so that the tomatoes would grow better. One of the bottom lines was that to be part of the vine/branches community, we need to take action to make it work. I thought I'd give you an update on the garden.

For the last two weeks, I have been the only 2-legged creature in the house. Not the only creature - there are 6 4-legged creatures - 2 of the feline variety and 4 of the canine type - plus, an unknown number of 6-legged little, itty bitty ants, who seem to appear out of nowhere around the kitchen and bathroom sinks, and, sometimes, in my computer! My 2 main jobs during these weeks have been to take care of the animals and to take care of the garden - water it, pick suckers from the tomatoes, cut the vegetables that are ripe, and don't let the guy who cuts the yard weed eat the cucumber vines that are growing out of their raised beds!

I have done my best, I think. None of the animals has gone without food or water, no one has escaped from the backyard, and no one has gotten stuck in the hole they dug under the house. I watered the garden every day the first week and picked a few suckers and one small cucumber. Then the monsoon arrived last weekend. I thought I'd hit pay dirt! Needless to say, I didn't have to water, and, thanks to continuing afternoon storms, I haven't watered this whole week.

So let me tell you about the garden. The snow peas have finished producing. The squash seems to have disintegrated - too much rain. I picked two more cucumbers, bigger and fatter than the first one. There are two tomato plants with lots of mostly green tomatoes on them. One of the plants fell over in the rain. When I tried to right it again, I noticed that lots of the tomatoes had a hole about a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter and a $\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep drilled in them, and everything around each hole was

brown. I decided that they would not be OK to eat, and that if I pulled them off, the plant would be lighter and stand upright again. I pulled off 12 holey tomatoes! Plus one totally rotten one and one - the ripest - had a big chunk missing as if some four-legged something had helped itself. The other plant? Not one hole, but several suckers that had gotten VERY big during the week. The green peppers seem to be OK. The moral of this story: sometimes a lot of rain is not really any different than not very much watering in terms of what the garden will produce.

Why am I telling you this?

In our staff meeting this week, Jim, Jeff and I read through the lessons as usual, and after we had read the gospel for today, Jim leaned back in his chair, clasped his hands behind his head and said, "Ah, the subjunctive mood!" A very satisfied smile crossed his face and he launched into a speech about his love for the subjunctive mood - how he had been an English major in college and therefore very familiar with it, some of the special writers who used the subjunctive, and how he loved to use it himself. Jeff and I, with absolutely beatific smiles on our faces (because we'd heard it all before), dutifully nodded our heads and agreed with everything he said. "The kingdom of God is as if..."

Even though Jim is, as we speak, ensconced in the family bay house in Panama City, it is as if he were here with us as well, so I feel duty-bound to say something about the subjunctive as well! (You know how he loves to be quoted!) Actually, a number of commentators make note of the fact that using this mood in today's gospel alters somewhat the meaning of the parable when the translation is "The kingdom of God is like..." instead. To say, the kingdom of God *is like*, is to use a metaphor; it refers to something that is abstract. And in terms of parables, the various metaphors Jesus uses to symbolize the kingdom of God often lead to being interpreted as allegories.

But the subjunctive mood of language expresses the possibility of something; the possibility of something that is contingent upon something else. The mood is wistful; it expresses a hypothetical which is entirely possible or imaginable, but which is dependent on something else happening first. The subjunctive is the mood of possibility and potential and hope: The kingdom of God is as if...

The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground. That's the contingency. If someone sows the seed, a garden might grow. The garden is the metaphor for the kingdom of God - the symbol of possibility, of potential, of hope.

That seems pretty easy and straightforward. One plants seeds. One pays more or less attention to the garden, but the plants grow and produce something independent of how much or how little care is given it. How does that work? We don't really know, but the promise from this gospel reading is that God makes it happen. God is working even or especially when you and I aren't looking, and that is our hope.

Now I don't know about all of you, but I know that some of you - and I include myself as well - some of us are control freaks. We want everything to happen the way we want it to happen and when we want it to happen. But as much as we'd like to, we do not have control over the garden. We think we have control, but we don't. Sure, we can buy expensive roto-tillers, bags of Miracle Gro, gallons of Roundup and chemicals to deter all the various bugs that like squash or tomatoes or melons. We can water the garden at regular intervals, using soaker hoses or automated sprinklers of various configurations. Or we can use the minimalist organic method (as I like to call it) - no tillers, no chemicals of any sort, just soap water to squirt on the bugs, and a regular hose and the power of a spray handle on the hose to water when it is convenient. Or we could use some sort of combination of the extremes. But no matter how hard we try, in the end we can't make it happen. We have to let go of our desire to control. The most we can do is cooperate with God's processes.

So who is it that scatters the seed? We are the ones, of course. We are the contingency called to sow the seed in the hypothetical garden that is the kingdom of God. We are called to scatter the seeds of love, of peace and justice, of kindness, and of life. It is, in fact, what we do out of our love for God. And then we are to hope, to trust that the earth will produce those fruits, not because we are controlling the process, but because God is. We'll see the fruit sometimes, but sometimes it will be hard to see. When that happens, we do not need to be discouraged. The hope will always be there because God's grace and love are given to us unconditionally.

May we, then, learn more surely to simply scatter the seed and then truly leave the rest to God.