



“The Realm of God is Like This” Part 9

The Seed Parables

Wildwood Mennonite Church // August 16, 2020

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Welcome to Wildwood...

...or rather, thanks for welcoming us into wherever you are in this at-home worship format.

This is not where we thought we'd be this summer! We are grateful for the familiar patterns and relationships that we have been able to resume, yet we are still grieving the loss of those that have changed and we are still feeling our way through the murkiness of whatever it is that is emerging.

As people of faith, we trust that God is present in all of those spaces: in the familiar, in the grieving, in the unknown. And we are grateful that you have joined us in this place, a reminder that we never walk alone. Welcome.

Music For Meditation // [Like A River Glorious](#) // Piano Recording from Lois M

Call to Worship

Creator God, from nothing you brought the entire universe into being.

You are the source of all life.

May our worship together, build our faith and trust in you--the only protection we need. Amen

Prayer for Truth and Reconciliation

Creator God,

Jesus reminded us of the second most important commandment,

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Help us to see, in particular, Indigenous People as our neighbor.

Keep our minds open to our own and other's racism.

Give us wisdom and strength to call out racism and to respond in a loving way to nudge out racist behavior in others and ourselves.

Lord, land and self determination are root issues in reconciliation.

Grant that we be open to listening to, learning from and acting on direction from Indigenous people.

God of all, we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Offering Prayer

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
And so in faith and with assurance we give our money.
We hope in a generous God who meets our needs.
We hope in a creative God who multiplies our gifts.
We hope in a mysterious God who invites us to Kingdom living.
God of grace, accept these gifts and us in your service. Amen

~ Copyright Carol Penner leadinginworship.com

Song // [The Kingdom of God](#) // Hymnal Worship Book #224

Children's Story // [Click here for video storytime with Breanne!](#)

Today's story is [I Am Enough](#) written by Grace Byers and illustrated by Keturah A Bobo.

Scripture // Mark 4:26-34 // *The Inclusive Bible* translation

Jesus said further, "The reign of God is like this: a sower scatters seed on the ground, then goes to bed at night and gets up day after day. Through it all the seed sprouts and grows without the sower knowing how it happens. The soil produces a crop by itself—first the blade, then the ear, and finally the ripe wheat in the ear. When the crop is ready, the sower wields the sickle, for the time is ripe for harvest."

Jesus went on to say, "What comparison can we use for the reign of God? What image will help to present it? It is like a mustard seed which people plant in the soil: it is the smallest of all the earth's seeds, yet once it is sown, it springs up to become the largest of shrubs, with branches big enough for the birds of the sky to build nests in its shade."

Using many parables like these, Jesus spoke the message to them, as much as they could understand. Everything was spoken in parables, but Jesus explained everything to the disciples later when they were alone.

Sermon // "The Realm of God is Like Canola" // Eileen Klaassen

(If you'd rather watch than read, [click here for the full video version](#) on youtube)

"Those fields are definitely mustard fields!" my teenage summer boyfriend insisted! But I knew better. He may have grown up on a farm, but so had I. And while farmers may have been growing mustard in his part of the world, I knew very well that they were growing canola in mine! And, of course, I felt proud to be right!



OK, to be entirely accurate, what we were growing in those days was rapeseed, but close enough. As you can see, although they are grown for different purposes, they look quite similar and for the purpose of this sermon, I think, they can be used interchangeably. Anyway, that's my rationale and I'm sticking to it!

My father-in-law started growing rapeseed early in the 70's. The first crop he grew gave him so much grief he referred to it in words I cannot repeat – and that not only because they were in low German! Apparently, the air was quite blue around that farm for a while!

What happened was that the first year he grew it he did not use a swath roller, thinking that was a ridiculous idea. And then a big wind came along after he swathed it and you can imagine these big bushy swaths rolled everywhere; literally spread all over the field. When he combined it, he had to go one pick-up width at a time. It was just a horrible mess and getting all tangled around the front of the pick-up reels. He swore he would never grow it again. Until he took it to the elevator, that is - at which point it became "black gold"! In fact, I think that was a turning point for him, economically speaking, and for the next 15 or 20 years, until he retired, he made good money by including rapeseed, and later canola, in his crop rotations.

Sometimes things can feel like a big mess – sometimes they ARE a big mess, until we figure them out. And sometimes the end result can be much different, much BETTER than we could have predicted.

But let's have a closer look at our parable. It begins with Jesus telling them, "The reign of God is like this: a sower scatters seed on the ground, then goes to bed at night and gets up day after day. Through it all the seed sprouts and grows without the sower knowing how it happens."

"Without knowing how it happens." After my young friend gave birth to her first baby, she gazed on this new little being with awe and wonder. "How can this be?" she marvelled. "How do egg and sperm unite to form THIS? This new little being, perfectly formed; each individual part perfectly functional? How does this even happen?"

Another young friend with whom I was having coffee was on a bit of a rant about how there couldn't possibly be a God. I let him go on a while before I interrupted. "What I'd like to know," I wondered aloud, "is why bananas are always divided into three segments. Always three." Well, I derailed him, but not really in the way I had hoped. He hadn't ever thought about the marvel of bananas.

But I think about these things. How DO plants and animals, including fish and birds, and human beings – how do all the parts grow into skin and organs and bones and muscles and fins and wings and fur without getting all mixed up? To me this is a marvel beyond my grasp. God has designed all of creation far beyond my ability to comprehend.

Our seed parable today notes that the kingdom, or reign, of God is like a seed that is planted. And the sower moves through the days and nights that follow without having an idea how it is that the seed sprouts and grows, first the roots, then the stem, followed by leaves and flowers, which turn into seed. The sower has no understanding of how it did that. But the life of each seed unfolds as God has planned.



As Jesus goes on with his parable, he asks, “What comparison can we use for the reign of God? What image will help to present it?” I can imagine Jesus looking up, stroking his chin as he searches for an appropriate simile. “Aha! He says, “It is like a canola seed!”

The seemingly innocent reference to the sower going to bed and rising is exactly what the seed is doing. It is planted in the soil and then rises up out of it. The word for “getting up” is the same as is commonly used for resurrection... It is a reminder that seemingly small and benign beginnings can have end results that are unexpected and powerful.¹ A brief time of prayer which may seem like doing nothing, can produce dramatic change. A small act of prayer might seem inefficient and ineffectual but it can produce incredible results.

N.T. Wright says “this passage is all about a fresh vision of God, the creator, coming to rescue [God’s] people, coming to restore Israel after her time of devastation. Israel mustn’t think her God is incapable, powerless, on a level with the pagan idols that promise much and do nothing.” On the contrary, God is totally capable of keeping a promise and of acting powerfully and persistently. And though we may wonder how things can possibly work out, how God can possibly be at work, that’s how it is. Like a canola seed, that despite our oblivion and lack of comprehension, does what it does: it grows from a tiny black seed into a shrub many, many times its original size.

This year, on my road trips, I have seen some incredible canola crops – and although this picture is a bit of a trick picture, I am told that there are varieties that actually grow that tall! At this time of year, you will see that fields once bright yellow, have turned green; that the plant has produced a tall, thick bush of pods. The reign of God is like a canola seed.

The ideas for this sermon actually started from a TV ad, although for the life of me I can’t remember what the ad was for, or exactly what it said. But the idea, basically, was that if we see that this pandemic gives the earth and its people time to breathe, to catch up to itself and become a better world when all is said and done, then THIS is the time to consider what that could look like and how we could help to bring that about.

And despite the person who said, months ago, that this is not the time for self improvement or doing much beyond preserving our sanity, I wonder if it may be time to at least start dreaming about what needs to change in terms of power dynamics, distribution of wealth... you name it. Where do YOU see change needed in our world if it is to look like the realm of God? And what might a tiny starting place look like?

Now here is the best segue ever!

This is not only a picture of a canola field, although you can see it in the background. In the foreground you see an image of Tristan Durocher, who started an initiative he called “*Walking With Our Angels*... after a bill created by an NDP MLA representing northern Saskatchewan was voted down. The bill would have required the provincial government to recognize suicide as a health and safety priority and the province would have had to recognize suicide as a public health issue.”²

As you will know, if you’ve been following the news, Durocher and Chris Merasty — the founder of a support group in La Ronge — walked the 635 kilometres from Air Ronge to Regina where

¹ Wright, N.T. *Mark for Everyone*. John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2001 & 2004. p. 49

² <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/walking-with-our-angels-suicide-awareness-1.5670110>



Dorochoer began a hunger strike at the Legislature, which he plans to continue until meaningful legislation is passed.

The attempt to bring suicide awareness and education to both the government and the inhabitants of Saskatchewan began with just two persons, but as they neared Regina, they were joined by members of the Saskatchewan Aboriginal Women's Circle Corporation, and more supporters joined as they walked through Regina toward the legislative buildings. I noted that a friend who is a Lutheran pastor in Regina posted an invitation for clergy and others to join them. The reign of God is like a canola seed.

I will mention briefly, a recent book written by Alan Kehler, who comes out of our own Mennonite circles. This book, called *MENTal Health: It's Time to Talk*, has just recently been approved as part of the curriculum for the Mental Health & Wellness program at Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT). So with the writing of this book, one person's strong understanding that it's time, not only for women, but also for men to learn to talk about their struggles with mental health, is resulting in a much greater awareness and openness in doing that.

Glennon Doyle, author of books such as *Love Warrior* and *Untamed*, and the founder and president of "Together Rising" says, "We live in a world where people believe that We Belong To Each Other. We live in a world where people give away hard-earned money to strangers. We live in a world where Love Wins. And we have proof: Since 2012, *Together Rising* has raised over Twenty-Five Million Dollars, with a most frequent donation of [just] \$25."³

The website goes on to explain that "Whether it's pulling children out of the sea outside the refugee camps in Greece, helping abandoned kids on the streets in Indianapolis, establishing the first opioid recovery home for pregnant teens in New Hampshire, building a maternal health wing in Port-au-Prince, providing a single mother access to breast cancer treatment, or keeping a foster family's heat on in Texas — Together Rising identifies what is breaking the hearts of our givers as they look around their world and their community, and then we connect our givers' generosity with the people and organizations who are effectively addressing that critical need." (Unquote) It started with one person's idea that people are generous at heart, and need some way to respond to the heartache around them.

Glennon Doyle is not alone in her belief in the innate generosity of people. Rutger Bregman's book *Humankind: A Hopeful History*⁴ is considered "the riveting pick-me-up we all need right now" as he offers the "extraordinary argument that humans thrive in a crisis and that our innate kindness and cooperation have been the greatest factors in our long-term success on the planet." Contrary to the long-held belief that we are innately sinful beings, he asks, "What if it isn't true?" and believes instead that humankind is "hardwired for kindness, geared toward cooperation rather than competition, and more inclined to trust rather than distrust one another."


To consider that we are hardwired for kindness is a daring statement. It raises the bar, if you will, and challenges us to prove its truth.

A couple of years ago, Rev. Dr. William Barber II and the Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis revived what is known as *The Poor People's Campaign*. Theoharis describes the Kingdom of God as a movement of

³ <https://togetherrising.org/about/>

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https://www.amazon.com/Humankind-Hopeful-History-Rutger-Bregman/dp/0316418536/ref=sr_1_1?crid=3NPXU83SPZ6T3&dchild=1&keywords=humankind+a+hopeful+history&qid=1596907359&sprefix=humankind%2Caps%2C233&sr=8-1



solidarity, saying the Kingdom of God is a movement of solidarity with the poor and marginalized. She maintains that “The New Testament . . . portrays the survival struggles of the marginalized, the solidarity and mutuality among different communities, and the critique of a social, political, and economic system that oppresses the vast majority of people.” She continues: “Jesus’s teachings and actions around poverty, wealth, and power create a picture of him as a leader of a social, political, economic, and spiritual movement calling for a world without poverty, want, or oppression.”⁵

Remember, small beginnings can result in unbelievable growth!

You are likely aware that the Canadian Foodgrains Bank has a funding agreement with the Canadian Government that provides them with 4:1 matching grants up to a maximum of \$25 million a year. Just over a week ago, the Government of Canada announced they will provide the equivalent to every eligible dollar donated by individuals between August 4 and 24 to the Humanitarian Coalition and its members in response to the Beirut explosion, up to a maximum total amount of \$5 million. As I understand it, both MCC and the Foodgrains Bank are members. Small donations can result in more funds for these humanitarian causes!

So, what tiny seeds can we plant? What might we do as a church? What might we do as individuals? You will recall that last winter, Brenda stole – pardon me - “borrowed” a quilt from the Needles and Knots quilting group and hung it in the church foyer for the purpose of gathering information on ways in which we had “communi-ties”. As people attached tags to the quilt, we discovered there were many ways, some involving our work, and some volunteering - there are many ways that we as individuals are involved in the world around us.

One thing I was doing was singing in a choir. In itself that feels pretty insignificant, but when I thought more about it, I realized I do it not only for my own wellbeing, but by its nature, it provides a sense of community for all participants and music to stir the soul! For both singers and listeners, this choir promotes emotional, spiritual, and social wellbeing. A small act with widespread results.

Continuing on a musical note, since a young man here in Saskatoon was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis in 2010, his family, the Hughton family, have made it their mission to raise awareness and funds by organizing annual Music for the Gut concerts here in Saskatoon. They contributed nearly \$45,000 to Crohn's & Colitis Canada in the first 4 years, and over \$115,000 the last 5 years! From a spark of an idea, support has grown tremendously, more than they could have imagined!

In what ways do our seemingly small involvements, these various acts, whether volunteer or part of our paid work, promote wellbeing in the community? In what ways do our involvements move our world toward justice and peace? What potential do these involvements hold? I expect you can name some – or perhaps only God knows the full impact of our “communi-ties”.

It may be that these are on hold for now. Yet there may be ways in which they could be continued or adapted while keeping Covid-19 precautions in mind. What new ways come to mind, ways that we can serve our community and our world? We talk about wanting to get back to normal – and then on second thought we realize the good old days (we can talk like that now) - the “good” old

⁵ Taken from Richard Rohr's Daily (Email) Meditation “A Movement of the Rejected”, from the Center for Action and Contemplation - accessed May 29, 2020

days were not all good. For some people in this world, they have been incredibly unfair and unbelievably hard.

In this church I see many ways that we seek to serve the poor and the marginalized. The pastoral care fund, the gift cards we keep on hand for needy folks who stop in, the quilts that are made, the support of MCC, and the Mental Health First Aid course we are working on offering for staff and others interested – these are but a few, and they point to a church mindset that is intent on supporting the less fortunate in our society.

Yet in the world around us, it is time for systemic change, and perhaps this is as good a time as any to start sowing those seeds. How can we become better agents of transformative and peaceful social change? While our part in bringing about a better world begins with tiny steps that seem inefficient and ineffective, we don't know how it happens, yet God is able to work marvels far beyond our ability to understand - with incredible results! If we want a better world, now is the time to get involved.

What new things can we do now, in this time, to begin bringing God's reign to earth? As a reminder, I suggest going for a drive in the country. And when you are there, remember the tiny seeds from which these crops grew. Consider what small deed you are doing or might do, which can be used by God to produce a bountiful crop in God's kingdom! We only plant the seed, but however tiny it is, God can grow results, in ways that are beyond our understanding, beyond our comprehension! Through our small deeds of faithfulness, God promises that amazing and incredible changes CAN happen – for God's realm is like a canola seed!

The realm of God is not otherworldly and immaterial, as some have claimed. Instead, as Theoharis maintains, "God's [realm] is a real, material order, with a moral agenda different from and opposed to the reigning order of the day.... In God's [realm], there is no poverty or fear, and mutuality exists among all... the poor and marginalized are lifted up and their needs are met."⁶ We, as Christ's followers, are asked to model a community of mutuality and solidarity; and to strive for creating this here on earth.

I'd like to close with this prayer/ meditation written by Rev. angel Kyodo Williams.⁷

May all beings be granted the strength, determination and wisdom
to extinguish anger and reject violence as a way.

May all suffering cease and may I seek, find, and fully realize
the love and compassion that already lives within me
and allow them to inspire and permeate my every action.

May I exercise the precious gift of choice and the power to change
[as] that which makes me uniquely human
and is the only true path to liberation.

May I swiftly reach complete, effortless freedom
so that my fearless, unhindered action be of benefit to all.

May it be so. Amen.

⁶ Taken from Richard Rohr's Daily (Email) Meditation "A Movement of the Rejected" - sent May 29, 2020

⁷ Taken from Richard Rohr's Daily (Email) Meditation "Love and Justice Are Not Two", from the Center for Action and Contemplation – accessed Friday, June 19, 2020.



Sharing Time // ["Hey Wildwood..." online sharing](#)

Not hearing from one another in person through the Sharing Time is a significant loss for many of us. It's not the same, but one way to express your grief, anxiety, prayer requests and gratitude is through the "Hey Wildwood" link above. If you're able, join us for our Sunday Morning Zoom gatherings, or check your email for the sharing items from last Sunday. Or maybe now would be a good time to pause your reading to call someone from church or elsewhere that you haven't heard from this week.

Congregational Prayer


God of great gifts,
for the world as we know it, we give you thanks!
The world in all its nearness,
our own special corners, our own dearest vistas,
the way it meets us each morning when we open our eyes.
For the food you provide, we give thanks,
the shape and feel of it in our hands,
the taste of it in our mouths,
We give thanks for the way you people the world,
the particularity of each special person we know and love,
We open ourselves to love.
We give thanks for all this world in its immense beauty,
its staggering strength, its heights and depths,
the breadth of it, beyond our knowing.
And yet you know it, you know us,
you have made yourself known.
We thank you for the contours of your love
in the form of a son who is bread and wine and water and truth.
We are eager to be like him, to be born again in his likeness.

Open us to the Holy Spirit:

Help us this week to have compassion for those who fear:
for those who are fleeing bombs and bullets,
for those who face governments that are oppressive,
for those who cannot worship openly, but must meet in secret.
In our own community, there are people who live with the fear of violence.

We need your Spirit to confront powers and principalities,
tyrants and governments and corporations
that feed off of and perpetuate poverty.





Help us to be people of refuge, who offer help and support,
and who go the extra mile when we see people in need.

You know the prayers of our hearts.
Some of us are sick and tired, some of us are worried,
we fear for those we love, we fear the future.
Some of us are grieving, we don't know how to go on.
We need your help!

Forgive us for the times we have been too wrapped up
in our own fears and joys to truly see our neighbour.

Allow us not to be swallowed up by self-preservation to the extent that we take more than we
need and ignore those who are in need around us. Call us back to our purpose to care for your
creation. Call us back to our mission of loving the least of these through service and self-
sacrifice. Call us back to yourself so that we can let go of our own worries and trust in you.

Help us this week to embrace joyful living,
being mindful of the gift of each day.

Give us courage to speak loving words to each other,
to both live and give the love you've shown us
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Blow into our lives with your freshening spirit,
the Breath of Life for all the world.

AMEN

*~ Most of this is a compilation of words from Carol Penner, with a few words from
Moses Falco.*

Song // [You Shall Go Out With Joy](#) // Hymnal Worship Book #427

Benediction

Go into your week knowing that you can fully trust God, that you are completely loved by God.
Let us share that love with all we meet this week. Amen.