

People of Promise - 1st UC Apr.02/06

I Fruit

It was one of those interesting revelations, just when you think you know what's going on... we were on one of those cross country trips, all the longer as the children were still pretty young. We were pointing out sights and creatures as we went when we came upon a field of cows... those are cows. That's where milk comes from. To which my youngest promptly replied, with all the certainty of three year old wisdom 'No it doesn't! Milk comes from the grocery store! I've helped carry the cartons.' Even coming from farming roots, it's easy for us as adults to forget about the work and care that goes into bringing the milk from cow to shelf. We just expect it to be there and enjoy the finished product.

Probably some of you have already been combing your seed catalogues for something new to tuck into that spare bit of earth along the fence. Seed catalogues start arriving in January. Glossy, bright pictures of amazing flowers and vegetables. Not that we blame them. Bare patches of dirt or pictures of earthy, blistered hands wouldn't sell too many seeds frankly.

We live in an Instant culture... we want the finished product, often without any involvement in the process.

Jesus offers different model...Unless a grain of wheat
Most of us would rather go straight from seeds to fruit or better yet just pick the fruit up at the store. Let someone else worry about everything else

Gardening, growing things is messy. Even repotting a houseplant seems to get dirt everywhere. No matter how careful I am. It gets under the nails, tracked through the house. Then there's the watering, weeding, slugs and bugs and aching backs and creaky knees. It's not really for the faint of heart. Then the waiting for things to grow - visions of seed catalogues keep us hopeful.

Come to think of it living as people of promise isn't really for the faint of heart either. Although the comfortable pew looks more attractive to my bones with each passing year.

John's gospel is to the Christian, a bit like a seed catalogue to a gardener in that -30 snap when the days are still more night than light. John writes to a generation who's never met Jesus, never tasted water turned to wine, nor danced with the lame made whole, instead they've lived through the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, the desolation of their way of life. John writes to people

who are looking for meaning, people for whom death is all too familiar.

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies. With these words John invites listeners then and now to see something beyond the finality of Jesus' death.

Offers the assurance that those who face suffering and persecution because of their belief will participate in Jesus' resurrection. God's promise of new life, hope, transformation, the possibility of fruit is trustworthy and true for them.

For the early church who struggled with explaining how Jesus could be God's son, and still die on a cross, the image of a seed dying in order that it might bear fruit made sense.

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies...

Jesus speaks to his disciples about his own life and death and about their role as his disciples. He uses an every day image to show them how something good can come out of his death. To give them hope in those times when the weight of life's dirt presses in, or nothing much seems to be happening. It can't have been easy for them, facing persecution, perhaps being rejected by their family or community. Was it worth it?

Fortunately for us, they didn't let Jesus' teaching, healing, or the mystery of his death and resurrection die on the cross. They continued to sow the seeds of their belief and commitment, without which, we wouldn't be sitting here.

Your United church continues to reap the harvest of seeds sown by previous generations. People who ... *insert some instances from your community of faith*. We also carry the faith DNA of a national church that is rooted in protestant traditions from around the world, that grew out of the same seeds as our Catholic and Islamic and Jewish brothers and sisters. Sometimes we forget about those roots. We see only the differences. Separate people into "us" and "them".

And yet deep within there are common connectors. Like the amazing forest of aspens in just south of the Wasatch mountains of Utah. The forest covers 106 acres and contains approximately 47,700 tree trunks. All are part of the same root system. Sometimes we forget we don't have to do it all ourselves... or we fall into despair because it seems like we're the only ones making an effort.

Ministers get seduced by that temptation from time to time. Confusing themselves with God, feeling like they are the ones who

keep a church open or make it grow. Congregations sometimes add to those expectations and sometimes fall into the same temptation. But we are all part of a long line of seeds being scattered, tended, pruned and harvested. Sometimes we enjoy the hey day of a harvest that was not really of our own sowing. At other times it might seem as if we do a whole lot of work and nothing much changes. Some seeds lay dormant for many years before the right amounts of moisture and sunlight cause them to germinate.

It might be nice if we could make it all happen, fill this church to overflowing, have to limit how many Sundays a youth teacher could work because we had so many people who wanted volunteer; clean out the basement rooms not just because of their fire hazard but because we had so many small groups of disciples eager to grow in their faith. Sounds a bit like the milk just magically appearing in the carton, don't you think?

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies... well that's the real crunch right there isn't it. Before new growth can come about, something else has to give way. Perhaps our faith, like growing seeds, requires a letting go, not a denial of what was but a willingness to look at what will be. A seed gives way to roots and shoots, but connections to the original seed remain and new seeds are formed. None of which can happen if the seed remains a seed. Jesus asks his followers to look at what keeps them from full and abundant life, from bearing fruit in his name.

What keeps you from bearing fruit?

Sometimes fear of change, sometimes we let culture dictate our role as people of faith, sometimes we let stereotypes about the roles of men and women, or prejudice about colour of skin or sexual orientation

Sometimes we worship the rules and words of faith, rather than their intent and we condemn others whom God calls beloved.

Sometimes we think we are too small and insignificant to make a difference.

Strangely when I talk to people about what helped them most during times of suffering... It wasn't the grand gestures, -> it was people who listened more than talked, who shared a teary hug, or simply showed up to sit, to make meals or care for children.

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground...

We are part of what Jesus left on earth. Not a building or a doctrine, not a book, but a visible community to embody him, to represent him

and bear fruit in his name. We are the fruit of his teaching and miracles, the blooms of his love, that wither and die to scatter more seeds.

Deep within ourselves lie the seeds of God's love, says Jeremiah, in the connections and the nurturing of this community the seeds of God's forgiveness and the knowledge of God's love is writ deep within our hearts.

We are people of promise, people called to live with a purpose... to scatter God's love and compassion, to be willing to let go enough for new life to take over... to trust that God is always tending, infusing the smallest of seeds with abundant harvest.

We know the theory, of seeds that die to rise,
will we let it bear fruit in our living?

If the harvest is to continue... what seeds will we sow?

We are part of this story. Hear what the Spirit is speaking to us.
Amen.