

Watching the Corn Grow

[Text - Mark 4:26-34]

Pastor Dave Shackle

June 17, 2018

There's a story about a foolish farmer who plants some corn. After a couple of weeks, he pulls up a few of his plants to see how they're doing. He wants to make sure that his corn is growing properly, so he continues to pull some plants every day to check it. Of course, by harvest time, this foolish farmer has little to gather, because he's destroyed most of his crop with his persistent worrying, and by trying to watch the corn grow.

In contrast to this, is the attitude of a member of the first church I served. Stone Creek Lutheran Parish is made-up of two churches - Zion and Salem - located in the hills of Southeast Ohio. One of the patriarchs of the Salem Church was a man named John Ridenour. I remember John showing me the lay-out of his farm, early in the first Spring I was there. He said, "That's corn over there, and back there is wheat, and across the road are soybeans." Well I *looked*, but all I saw was an empty field, another empty field, and a little bit of green starting to sprout across the road.

Essentially, I saw nothing! But John Ridenour, who year after year had prepared that ground and planted the seed, had a vision of what was to come - corn and wheat and soybeans. Where I saw little or nothing, he was able to envision new life and growth; and the hope of a good and productive harvest. John planted his corn and then he watched it grow - not by pulling it up every day to check it; but by going about his every-day business of milking the cows, mending fences, maybe spraying the fields for bugs or weeds. John patiently and faithfully watched the corn grow - trusting that the life in

that seed, and the Holy Source of All Life, would bring about a steady and productive growth, and a fruitful harvest.

Jesus reminds us that *farming* and *faith* have a lot in common, because they both involve a solid and fundamental *trust*. Trust that the Source of all Life is present to bless our efforts; trust that the Holy One will cause new growth and new life to spring-up before our eyes. Sometimes in our day-to-day living, it becomes easy for us to question whether or not God is truly present - if the Source of this vast universe is actually concerned about Life on this tiny speck of cosmic dust we call *earth*. We look around and see war and violence, crime and corruption, disease and drought - and we ask ourselves, "Where is God in all of this?" Or maybe we look at our own lives, and see confusion and pain, frustration and anger. We ask ourselves, "Why?" "Why can't I live as a focused and fulfilled person? Where's this Divine Realm that Jesus talks about? Where are its manifestations in this turbulent world, or in my own chaotic life?"

Perhaps, like that foolish farmer, you and I are tempted to impatiently tear-up the field, frantically looking for signs of life, hope, or growth. But that's not how things work - in the field of farming, or in the arena of faith. Just as a person can't force a plant to grow, or hurry it along, neither can you or I force or hurry the fulfilment of the Divine Realm. A mature faith takes time and patience; it doesn't just happen overnight. And anyone who claims that they have found perfect peace and wholeness "ever since they invited Jesus into their lives" aren't telling the whole truth! As long as you and I live in this world, we will have our ups *and* downs, our joys *and* sorrows, our victories and our defeats. Jesus says it himself, "In this world you will have tribulation." [That's a fact of Life.] But then Jesus adds these words of hope: "But be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world."

The way in which Jesus “overcomes” this world, with all of its pain and sorrow and troubles, is to patiently and faithfully confront each problem with the power of Divine love and grace. When he sees a person afflicted with illness or oppressed by a troubled spirit, he reaches-out and touches that person with compassion and restoration. When he sees little children being pushed-aside by self-important adults, Jesus welcomes those little ones to himself; and he reminds those grownups that the Divine Realm belongs to the humble and vulnerable of this world. When presented with a multitude of hungry people, Jesus joyfully takes five little loaves and two small fish - offered to him by a young boy - and demonstrates that in the blessing and sharing of even the most modest of gifts, the abundance of Life can be experienced and enjoyed by all!

In the Divine Realm, little things *do* become big; the lowly *are* raised-up; and the meek, not the mighty, inherit the earth. Jesus has this marvelous ability to look beyond the appearance of things and people, and to see the tremendous possibilities. He is able to transform a group of lowly fishermen, tax-collectors, humble men and women, into a compassionate yet powerful community of faith. A community not so different from our own: small in number; consisting of some rather peculiar people; yet remarkably strong in its mission of loving, serving, and accepting all people with Divine Love and Grace! It doesn't take a Mega-Church to do magnificent things for God and others; it takes a church that has faith in the magnificent power of Divine Possibilities.

In the Divine Realm, even the smallest act of kindness, the slightest step of faith, can bring about remarkable results. This is why Jesus speaks so often about the importance of

the little things: the widow's small coin offered in faith; the cup of cold water given with compassion; the small acts of kindness done "to the *least* of these" our brothers and sisters; that tiny grain of mustard seed. In the Divine Realm, as in Life itself, growth and maturity take time and patience and persistence. And even in those times when it seems as if our faith is dormant, it doesn't mean that it's not growing or deepening or preparing to spring-forth in amazing and exciting ways.

No matter how young or old we may be - as long as we live - you and I *are* on a journey: a journey of Life and Faith. And though it may be tempting for us, like little kids in a car, to keep asking "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" - it's important that we learn to sit-back, take a breath and *relax*; to trust that the One who drives this universe is faithfully moving us forward at the right speed, in the right direction; until we all arrive at that perfect destination.