

This is a collection of how children perceive their grandparents.

A grandson called his grandfather to wish him a happy birthday. The boy asked how old grandpa was, and he replied, '80.' The grandson was quiet for a moment and then asked, "Did you start at 1?"

A grandmother didn't know if her granddaughter had learned her colors yet, so she decided to test her. She would point out something and ask what color it was. She would tell the grandmother, and she was always correct. The grandmother was enjoying it, so she continued. At last, the granddaughter had had enough and headed for the door saying, "Grandma, I think you should try figuring out some of this stuff for yourself!"

A grandson was visiting one day and asked, 'Grandma, do you know how you and God are alike?' The grandmother began mentally polishing her halo and said, "No, how are we alike?" "You're both really old," the boy replied.

A grandson asked his grandfather how old he was. The grandfather teasingly replied, "I'm not sure." "Just look in your underwear, Grandpa," the boy advised, "Mine says I'm 4-6."

Jesus says "Here's the way it is with God's kingdom, reign, rule, or empire. Listen up! We know that this realm coming to us is inaugurated by Jesus Christ – but when and where? How do we become citizens of this realm?"

If we ask these questions of Jesus, what we get are not straightforward, easy-to-understand answers. We get parables. "God's realm is like..."

This Snippet from Mark has Jesus telling 2 stories pointing to the reign of God. One of the stories marvels at the mystery of growing seed. The other is about the mustard plant. All this storytelling concludes with the statement that Jesus taught only in parables, but then "He explained everything in private to His disciples." (4:34) A challenge we face is that we were not part of that private conversation with His disciples. Therefore, we've got to interpret these stories as best we can. Here's where I make up a bunch of stuff and pray that none of you contradict me! Nah.....I read a lot trying to understand this myself!

The first parable about the seed is a reminder that the germination and growth of the seed is in God's hands, not ours. Sure, the farmer must sow the seed, but after that -- the farmer is clueless about just how the seed germinates and comes to harvest. Partly this parable counsels patience when it comes to our expectations for the growth of God's realm. One thing we know for sure: the growth is up to Christ and not to us, and He never seems to work on our timetables.

The next parable is, in its own way, even more befuddling. Jesus is talking about the reign of God, God's kingdom. Then He begins talking about mustard weeds (4:30-32) Mustard is an herb that was alleged to have some medicinal properties – but mostly mustard is a weed, a pest, something to be laboriously pulled from gardens, nor is it a very impressive plant. We are not very impressive disciples of Jesus, but when it comes to our participation in the realm of God, God can do impressive things with us. Good news! I've always loved that story about Mother Teresa, who wanted to start her order to serve the poor and she had something like \$1.38. Her superior said, "Sister Teresa, you can't do anything with \$1.38." "True," Teresa replied, "But with GOD and \$1.38 I can do everything!"

The contrast of moving from very small to much larger is an interesting one. We can imagine the impact of the parable of the mustard seed upon struggling, small, early Christian congregations. Maybe Jesus is also emphasizing the predatory qualities of mustard plants. That lowly little weed could really mess up a well-tended garden. Maybe that was how early Christian communities saw themselves in their creeping, gradual overtaking of the well-planned, well-financed, highly powerful Roman Empire. One day, that pesky little thing we called the church would be headquartered in the very city of Caesar's great empire. Good news!

Now these 2 parables, like so many of Jesus parables, don't explain or define much. Rather they tease and stoke our imaginations. We are not to try to make exact comparisons between the images of the parables and the actual reign of God. But Jesus invites us playfully to imagine a world of being transformed by God so that things that are considered insignificant – like the fledgling Christian community – are revisioned as the way God works to reclaim the world. Good news! (adapted from Willimon, PULPIT RESOURCE, April-June 2021, p. 33-34)

Second, so what do we do with this? Well, the mustard seed faith reminds us that small things can lead to major accomplishments. Like the Almighty God of Creation working through ordinary people and ordinary circumstances. Like the Eternal God creating opportunities for good right here and right now. And we see this right here at St. Andrew's. Two women -- one from this parish – Mary Jo Bukowski – now Mary Jo Close -- and her friend Patricia Hartley – in 2005 --decided that somebody should feed the hungry on weekends. So they made 50 sandwiches, added a bottle of water to each one, put them in brown bags, and went to downtown Raleigh and found folks who were hungry and gave the bags away. And that small seed became Brown Bag Ministry, now having served over 1.3 million meals.

It's also there in the Haiti Goat Project, begun here at St. Andrew's by parishioner and NC State professor Charlotte Farin – who had a dream to feed undernourished children in Haiti. Thanks to the hard work of Char and her team, and your generous support over the last 17 years, one small corner of the world is literally being changed. These are literally miracles in our midst.

We often are so busy looking for the big calling, the big vision, the big miracle, the big ministry God has for us to do that we overlook the little opportunities all around us. If we overlook the little good works we can do, the little kindness or encouragement or hope we can offer, if we overlook the little ways we can shine God's light on the world, then we will not be prepared for the big opportunities God has to use us for His glory.

In his book, HOW GOD WORKS, Edward T. Sullivan writes, "When God wants an important thing done in this world, or a wrong righted, He goes about it in a very singular way. He does not release His thunderbolts or stir up an earthquake. He simply has a tiny, helpless baby born, perhaps in an obscure home, perhaps of a very humble mother. Then He puts the idea or purpose into the mother's heart, she puts it into the baby's mind and then – God waits."

Is God waiting for us? God has placed the power of His kingdom inside of each one of us. God has placed the vision of His kingdom inside of us – that's why we come to church! And now God is waiting for us to do our part in establishing His kingdom on this earth. In Ephesians, we are told "We are created in Christ Jesus to lead the life of good deeds." (2:10) We might want to pray on a daily basis, "God, please show me the good deeds you want me to do today."

The gospel itself is a rather unique celebration of the seemingly small and insignificant. Bethlehem was a small town. Nazareth was too. Calvary was a tiny spot on the globe. There was nothing particularly significant about the profession of carpenter or fisherman or tax-collector. Yet these are the people who became Jesus' disciples, His followers. These are the people who changed the world. The tiny mustard seed planted 2000 years ago by Jesus and His disciples must have shown little promise. Life is like that. Look to the little things, the little opportunities and circumstances where we can share God's love and mercy and compassion every day. Mustard seed faith, first of all, says that small actions can lead to major accomplishments. (adapted from DYNAMIC PREACHING, p. 34-35)

Third, all of this growth imagery that we find in the scriptures make a significant point about our life of faith. And that is, that it is never static, it is supposed to evolve. The universe unfolds, our understanding of God evolves and deepens, and our moral development surely evolves as well. We simply cannot, as adults, live by the same overly simplistic rules that governed our morality as children. Carl Jung famously said: "We cannot live the evening of our lives according to the program of our morning." St. Paul intuited the same wisdom – as we love more deeply, we will behave differently – "When I was a child I used to talk like a child, think like a child, reason like a child. When I became a man I put childish ways aside." (see 1 Cor 13:11-13) We could look through 4 stages with regard to our growth as disciples of Christ.

Unfortunately so much of the talk about growth has been about CLEANING UP. We largely reflected the moral preoccupations of the dominant culture in every age. Our mostly external understanding of morality has often been very superficial and reflected our not-so-grown-up culture's values of various 'purity codes.' These were bound to our time in history and seldom driven by the brilliance of Jesus' moral ideals, which have to do, first of all, with our inner attitudes (Mt 6-7) This is how we can become so incensed about homosexuality and ignore compassion. If we're not gay – or have no one in our family that we KNOW is gay – we can feel very good about ourselves because we are not. "Look how holy I am because I'm not gay." Or "look how holy I am because I never had an abortion." But calling a woman who has had an abortion a murderer doesn't make it very easy for her to find her way back to the mercy and compassion of God. The reality is that Jesus teaches and embodies a change in consciousness itself. Mature morality is largely a series of religious encounters leading to a deep transformation of consciousness. Any preoccupation with our private moral perfection—or someone else's -- keeps our eyes on ourselves and others – but not on God or grace or love. Cleaning up is mostly about the need for early impulse control and creating necessary ego boundaries – so we can actually show up in the real and much bigger world. It's a necessary step. But it's just the FIRST step. Unfortunately too many people never get beyond it. The Christian is a lifelong student of Christ the Master; the trouble starts when we think we've graduated. (SoundBYTE SPIRITUALITY: Sayings to awaken faith, p. 69, Brett C. Hoover and Frank Sabatte) We have to remain teachable/formable – for a lifetime.

Second, GROWING UP refers to the process of psychological and emotional maturity that persons commonly undergo, both personally and culturally. We all grow up, even if inside our own bubbles. The social structures that surround us highly color, strengthen, and also limit how much we grow up and how much of our own shadow self we will be able to face and integrate. As Americans we are still struggling to get relations among the races right – and a lot of it goes back to the sins of slavery and racism. Until we face these truths honestly, we will never grow up – as individuals or as a nation.

WAKING UP refers to any spiritual experience which overcomes our experience of the self as separate from All Life in general. In other words, we must understand that we are connected to every other person on the globe. This connection should be the goal of all spiritual work, including prayer, sacraments, Bible study,

and religious services of any type. The great commandment is 2-fold – love of God AND neighbor. Any religious stress that leaves out neighbor is not authentically Christian. The purpose of waking up is not personal or private perfection, but service, surrender, love, union with God and others. This is the Christian meaning of salvation or enlightenment.

And finally, SHOWING UP means bringing our heart and mind into the actual suffering and problems of the world. It means engagement, social presence, and a sincere concern for justice and peace for others beyond ourselves, especially those most vulnerable and who have no one to speak for them. If we do not show up in the suffering trenches of the world, it is probably because we are still focused on either cleaning up, growing up, or waking up. Showing up is the full and final result of the prior 3 stages – God’s fully transformed “work of art” (Eph 2:10), or the mustard seed come to full stature as a place where the birds of the sky can dwell in its branches.” (Mk 4:30-34) (Rohr, FOUR SHAPES OF TRANSFORMATION, posting of 1 June 2021) May it be so for you and for me. Amen.