

Pentecost 3/Lectionary 11

June 14, 2009

Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ

Ezekiel 17:22-24 Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15 2 Corinthians 5:6-17 Mark 4:26-34

Confirmation – Grace Muriel Mueller

I have often joked that when it comes to gardening, I have a purple thumb. I've never had much luck with house plants or outdoor gardens. It seems the only time in my life when I could grow anything was when we lived in Germany. I don't know if it was because of the perfect positioning of our house for just the right amount and type of sunlight, or if it was the water – but I suspect it had something to do with the water. Our house there began to take on the look of a jungle, with lush plants lining every windowsill.

Despite my general ineptitude with plants, I've always *wanted* to be able to grow things. My dream seems to have finally come true, when earlier this year I purchased an AeroGarden. Are you all familiar with those things? It's an indoor hydroponic garden. This one sits on my kitchen counter.

Growing things couldn't be simpler! You simply fill the basin up with water, place the pre-seeded pods into their holders, dump in a couple of nutrient tablets, and plug it in. It's kind of like "Gardening for Dummies." It automatically turns the light on for a prescribed period of time each day, tells you when the water level is low, and a light goes on when it's time to add more nutrient tablets. It's the perfect thing for a lazy gardener.

I've had great delight in watching my plants grow. When I first planted it I'd check several times a day to see if the seeds had begun to sprout. I watched closely as they began to grow. And now that it's been a full garden for several months, I've enjoyed snipping off a few fresh herbs to add that extra-special something to my cooking. I feel like I've hardly done anything at all to generate the bounty I now enjoy from my kitchen garden.

So when I encountered today's text from Mark, I could really relate to the word in those first few verses. "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how." At least where my garden is concerned, it's as if someone else has done all the work for me.

But as anyone who's done any serious gardening or farming knows, it's a lot of hard work! It's not simply a matter of scattering the seed and waiting for nature to do the rest.

Here's a modern Jewish parable:

All their lives the two young brothers had lived in the city behind great stone walls and never saw field nor meadow. But one day they decided to pay a visit to the country.

As they went walking along the road they saw a farmer at his plowing. They watched him and were puzzled.

"What on earth is he doing that for!" they wondered. "He turns up the earth and leaves deep furrows in it. Why should someone take a smooth piece of land covered with nice green grass and dig it up?"

Later they watched the farmer sowing grains of wheat along the furrows.

"That man must be crazy!" they exclaimed. "He takes good wheat and throws it into the dirt."

"I don't like the country!" said one in disgust. "Only crazy people live here."

So he returned to the city.

His brother who remained in the country saw a change take place only several weeks later. The plowed field began to sprout tender green shoots, even more beautiful and fresher than before. This discovery excited him very much. So he wrote to his brother in the city to come at once and see for himself the wonderful change.

His brother came and was delighted with what he saw. As time passed they watched the sproutings grow into golden heads of wheat. Now they both understood the purpose of the farmer's work.

When the wheat became ripe the farmer brought his scythe and began to cut it down. At this the impatient one of the two brothers exclaimed: "The farmer is crazy! He's insane! How hard he worked all these months to produce this lovely wheat, and now with his own hands he is cutting it down! I'm disgusted with such an idiot and I'm going back to the city!"

His brother, the patient one, held his peace and remained in the country. He watched the farmer gather the wheat into his granary. He saw him skillfully separate the grain from the chaff. He was filled with wonder when he found that the farmer had harvested a hundred-fold of the seed that he had sowed. Then he understood that there was logic in everything that the farmer had done.¹

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God has begun a work in each of us. It is a work that was begun in baptism with the seed of faith, through the Holy Spirit, sown in each of us. It is a seed that, through tending and nurturance, continues to grow day by day, throughout our entire lives. It is a seed which will not reach its full bloom until that day when we stand face to face with our master gardener.

Today we celebrate with Grace Mueller as she affirms her baptism, a ritual we also refer to as Confirmation. We call it “Confirmation” because it is when she, as a young adult, stands before the congregation to confirm the faith that her parents claimed for her in baptism.

In baptism Grace was given her Christian identity. She was claimed by God as one of God’s own beloved children and made a member of the Church.

Because Grace was only a baby at the time, Ray and Mary Beth made certain promises on her behalf. They promised to: Bring her to church and the Lord's Supper; teach her the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments; give her a Bible and help her to use it; and nurture her in faith and prayer.

Grace was also given another gift in her baptism – the gift of the Holy Spirit, through whom we have faith. It is a testament to both her parents' careful nurturance of that gift of faith, and the work of the Spirit itself, that Grace will stand before you today to confirm her faith. She will stand before us, as the tiny seed which has grown through the nurturance of faith, to accept responsibility for her own faith life.

Our baptismal rite instructs parents to do those things – bringing the child to church and teaching them the basics of the faith – “so that [the child] may learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace.”² Grace has learned these lessons well, and is now prepared to claim for herself what her parents claimed on her behalf in baptism. Nowhere is this more evident than in the confirmation verse Grace selected, Ephesians 2:10 – “We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Grace, it has been my privilege and honor to work with you in preparation for your Confirmation. You are an extremely bright, insightful, and sensitive person. I so very much look forward to working with you for the Kingdom of God. I am delighted to call you “sister.”

Amen.

[1,275 words]

¹ Nathan Ausubel (ed.), *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore: Stories, Traditions, Legends, Humor, Wisdom and Folk Songs of the Jewish People*, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1948).

² Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 228.