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Christ Church † Washington Parish  
Sermon preached by the Rev. Martha Wallace  
June 14, 2009 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost Year B Proper 6

*The reign of  
God is  
growing  
somehow and  
we are part of  
it –somehow.*

I was halfway down the aisle when I realized that I had forgotten my sermon. Panicked, my mind flashed here and there trying to pull together something — anything that would be worth saying. What was it I had I written? The hymn ended. The readings began and nothing came to me. I step forward to read the Gospel thinking wildly — “seeds seeds, seeds — what is it I wanted to say about seeds? “The gospel of the Lord” I said and stepped to the pulpit, and I woke up in a cold sweat.

*The preacher’s recurrent nightmare* — Heart still pounding, I lay there, wondering what I could have said about seeds: seeds planted in me, seeds God gave me to plant, seeds God planted in places I would never know about— all these images came flooding in. I jumped up to make some notes as the images flashed by:

- *my 14 year old self giving my first sermon one youth Sunday, being overwhelmed by the feeling that this is what I was called to do — a seed was planted...*
- *the lady in Trinity Church Copley Square I told you about awhile back who invited me to stay for church when I was just there for the organ prelude — a seed was planted...*
- *the grateful woman in the parking lot at the seminary who had nothing and was so grateful for the small amount of money I gave her that I began to learn to be grateful for my many blessings— a seed was planted...*

That was the beginning of me praying the grateful and generous hearts prayer. Remember I told you about that? If you missed it, it is a simple thing: add the line “God, give me a grateful, generous heart” to every prayer you pray I have passed the grateful generous heart prayer on to every congregation I have served since then, and I know seeds given to me by the grateful woman have been passed on because four years after I left one of those congregations, I ran into a man from that church who greeted me by saying: “Martha — we think of you every day!” (And I thought, yeah, sure you do) He continued “Every day when we sit down to supper we pray the grateful generous hearts prayer and we think of you.” We plant a seed; God gives the growth. We may not

even know about the seeds we plant:

- *Like that proper Boston lady in Trinity Church I am sure never knew that the seed she planted eventually grew me into a priest.*
- *Like the grateful woman in the parking lot who I am sure has no clue about her effect on me and how many people have received and passed on seeds she gave me.*

Or like a woman who wrote me the most touching note I have ever received about how I had been the one to engender a positive change in her spiritual life — all the more touching because I had no idea who she was — I could not remember ever having met her. To me, she was one of 500 people in the pews on Sunday morning yet God touched her in some way she associated with me, and planted a seed. We plant seeds we never know about. God plants seeds through us and others but God gives the growth. We know not how.

Not all seeds are like mustard seeds, reaching their mature growth to a large shrub in one year. I was fourteen when I first stood in a pulpit and 50 when I was ordained. It has been 16 years since my interchange with the grateful woman and I am still growing into gratitude and generosity and passing her lesson on. But whether things spring up full grown in a season or take some time to mature — or whether it grows in our backyards while we ignore it — God gives growth to the seeds of the kingdom and they come to fruition in God's time. We know not how.

It is not a miracle but it is a mystery. The reign of God is growing somehow and we are part of it — somehow. We don't apparently need to know how that works. Every once in a while we get a glimpse of what is going on in the background — like the examples I mentioned earlier, but probably more often, we don't notice it. Yet the reign of God is slowly but steadily growing around us. What

Jesus' parables tell us this morning is that the reign of God is surely coming and we are not in charge of it. We may plant seeds, accidentally or on purpose but God gives the growth. And we don't have to understand how it works.

One thing though, I think is clear. The reign of God that is growing is right here and right now. It is not a pie in the sky by and by kingdom which we can only get to after we die. It is a future that starts with now and it is growing all around us, right here, right now.

The book of Acts says there were about 120 followers of Jesus just after his death. Current estimates say there are somewhere between about 1.9 – 2.1 billion Christians. When the Gospel tells us that Jesus explained everything to his disciples privately, I doubt that he gave them the details of how and when the reign of God would be established.

Given his clear statements that nobody except God knows that, it seems more likely that what he



taught them privately was that God can be depended upon to establish God's reign in God's good time.

That is still true today. God can still be depended upon even though we don't understand how it will happen or what the reign of God will look like. The seeds have been planted in this world and it is growing. That is something we can trust in and depend on. Just as God is our present, God is our future and God's reign will come. In this green season, may the growth around us be for us a sign of the mysterious growth of God's reign, in the world and in us, right here, right now.

May it be so.