

When you look at your life today, what's different compared to your life a year ago, three, five, twenty years ago?

I'm not asking about circumstances or events. I am asking about you. In what ways have you changed? Have your values changed, the things that guide and direct your life? Are your priorities different? Has your spiritual life changed? How about your concerns for the world and other people? What might trouble your soul and maybe break your heart these days? Are you loving in a different way? How has your self-image changed or the way you view the world? To use the language of the Gospel today, what seeds have germinated and taken root in you? What new sprouts are coming up in you? Where is growth taking place and what does that look like?

And how did any of that happen? When I look back on my life I can see all kinds of changes over the years. For example, as in many marriages, over time the bonds have become stronger and deeper although I can't really point to any thing in particular that made that happen. My life of prayer today is different from a few years ago and I'm not really sure when or how it changed but I know it has. I think I tend to be more honest with God about myself and my life. As I look around the suffering all over the world I think that my passion for justice, peace, and the well being of others has grown in ways I can't really explain. I guess I am seeing things that I used to ignore or assume had nothing to do with me.

My guess is that each of you could say similar things about aspects of your life. That is not to suggest that any of our lives have been a straight line of progression in one direction. We all know better than that. That's not how growth works. There are steps forward, backward, and sideways as our lives move from year to year.

The reality, as Jesus describes in the parable of the growing seed, is that there is a dynamic quality about our lives, a spirit moving within us. Every one of us has had seeds planted within us, and something is growing in us. Sometimes we don't see it, believe it, or trust it, but it's there. Sometimes we wait for years hoping, looking, and wondering when a particular aspect of our lives will change or mature, and then we see the first green blade rise up. Other times we wake up one day and are surprised by what has changed within us. How did that happen? When did it happen? I have to admit that I don't know and I can't explain it, but Jesus says that the seed has always been there in every one of us, waiting to see what, if anything, we would do with it. We did not create it or even ask for it, but it is real.

This parable Jesus tells is not about gardening or farming. Jesus is using images from gardening or farming to talk about your life and my life. His parable is a metaphor for the way God works in our lives. It's meant to be an encouragement and to offer hope. Our lives are like a garden that has been planted with seeds. We all know how that works. It takes time. A lot happens underground, out of sight, hidden within the soil of our lives. One of the challenges for us is that there's a lot of waiting. Then one day, maybe when we least expect it, something sprouts in our lives and begins to grow. As the parable says, "first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head." We are always in process, living into our completion.

It is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground," Jesus says. And I wonder, who are those someones in your life? Who has scattered seeds on the ground of your life? And what were those seeds? Who are the people that have loved and encouraged you, offered wisdom and guidance for your life, spoken difficult truths that changed your life? Who are the ones that gave you hope, stood by you, helped you find yourself? In what ways did he or she offer you a place to put down roots, find stability, and get your life in order? Who has awakened you and opened your eyes to see the world, others, and yourself differently? Who has inspired and mentored you? Who has called forth from you more than you thought you had? In what ways did someone grow you up and call you into your better self? Those are seeds scattered in your life by someone. Who is doing that for you today? What seeds is she or he scattering?

And what if you and I are to be seed scatterers in the lives of others, for the life of the world? Have we ever forgiven and reconciled with another, or asked someone's forgiveness? When have we put another's interest before our own? Who have we encouraged, loved, reached out to in compassion? When have we sat with someone in his or her grief and said, "I'll be here for you?" When have we spoken out and worked for justice? When have we shared with someone else the seed that is growing in our own lives? In what ways are we doing that today?

What barren ground is waiting to be seeded and planted with our lives, gifts, passions, presence, and concerns? Maybe it's the barren ground of racism, violence, poverty. Maybe it's the barren ground across which migrant families walk seeking a better life. Maybe it's the barren ground of loneliness, fear, or despair. Maybe it's the barren ground of grief, pain, or heartbreak. How might you and I scatter seeds in those places and a thousand others like them?

What is sprouting and growing in your life today? What is flourishing and blossoming? Where is there new growth? What does that growth look like? Is it in your faith journey, marriage, parenting, friendships? Maybe it's your concern for what is happening in our world today? Maybe there's a growing compassion for those in need. Maybe you have a new vision for who you are and how you want to live your life. Maybe it's a dream or vision for your life that is coming to fruition. Maybe your heart is softening and there's a new tenderness in your relationships.

What do you wish to be growing in the garden of your life? What colors or fragrances are missing? Where have weeds taken over? What needs attention?

I'm well aware that I have asked you more questions than I've given you answers. I really don't have any answers, and Jesus doesn't offer any in today's parable. Parables don't offer answers, but they ask us important questions. They give us our work to do. They offer a different lens through which to see ourselves, others, and the world. And maybe seeing differently is the beginning of being different. What is this parable showing you about your life and the world?

I guess the place to begin for each of us is to stop and realize that at our birth the Creator, the Great Farmer if you will, planted in us the seeds of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control as we are told in the Letter to the Galatians.

So, what will we do with what we see? Celebrate and give thanks? Water, fertilize, prune, pull some weeds? Maybe make some changes? The seed is there. God gave us both the freedom and the responsibility to treat it how we choose.