

Children's Moment

Hello, girls and boys. Esperanza and I pray for you and your family. We love you and we appreciate you.

I want to talk to you about something that's about to happen. There's about to be a change in our church family.

On July 1st, a new pastor, Pastor Susan, will come to be with you. I've been able to spend a little time with Pastor Susan and she's a very nice, very special person. I know you will love her and care for Pastor Susan, her husband Mark and her two children the same way you love and care for Esperanza and me.

You see, we will be moving to a new church. During this time of year in the United Methodist Church, that's what happens. Our Bishop and his team look at all of the churches and all of the pastors and they spend a lot of time praying where the best fit is for each.

Just like you, I have certain spiritual gifts and experience. God gave me those gifts and skills to help churches with certain kinds of needs. God gave Pastor Susan a different set of spiritual gifts and experiences so she can help churches where she goes. It's like having different teachers for different classes in school.

We've come a long way in five years. We've done a lot of good things together. Esperanza and I will miss you and we know you will miss us. This change is nothing to be worried about. No one did anything wrong. Nothing bad will happen. Let's celebrate the good we've done together.

But it's the season for change, for new beginnings and new experiences. Together with Pastor Susan, God has great plans for you. They are plans for all sorts of good things. So don't hold back or be afraid. Come and be part of what God is doing in our church and neighborhoods.

Please pray with me: God, sometimes we aren't sure why things happen the way they do. Good friends, family members and those we look up to move away. We feel sad. But you remind us that your love wins out over sadness. We have hope in you. So we look forward to making new friends, having new experiences and, most of all, enjoying our time with Jesus. In his name we pray, amen.

Message: “A Growing Family”

Do you know what a parable is? If you’ve been around us for a while or read your Bible recently, you know that Jesus taught using parables. We often think of them as a story with a morale.

For example, Hans Christian Anderson’s tale of the princess and the pea is a fairytale that has a morale. It warns us about jumping to conclusions before we have all of the facts. Another example is the story of the blind men and the elephant.

Parables are like that and more. Parable offer spiritual lessons. They are best when they are framed in the life situations of the people who are listening. One of the reasons why Jesus often uses farming or shepherding illustrations is because most of the people in his day relied on farming or herding for their living.

People grew crops to eat, sell or use for barter. They raised sheep for milk, meat and as an offering. They had to pay taxes – to the government, the temple and Rome, so Jesus also talked about money a lot. The best parables are those that are easy, yet they stick in your mind. You walk away thinking about the story and what it really means.

You can think of parables as a string of pearls circling a truth. The word parable literally means “cast alongside.” Each parable is valuable and offers insight by itself. Those who teach in this style, like Jewish rabbis, spin out image after image, wisdom saying after wisdom saying, parable after parable in a seemingly random way. It’s designed to tell a larger truth by focusing on small details or to tell about a whole by examining the parts. It’s describing a picture by showing a variety of perspectives. When you can put all the parables together, a deeper, more profound spiritual truth is revealed. The sum is greater than the parts.

Jesus told stories in this rabbinical style. Some of them weren’t even stories but were metaphors or images. They offered hints, glimpses of something just out of reach. Some of us may find these stories or images confusing. We say “Why doesn’t he just tell us plainly?” Well, some things are too complex to be plain. Sometimes you need to share the bigger picture to see true meaning.

The theme this week is about growing into the new creation we're called to be in Christ. So, let's talk about growing. Let's tell each other stories about the latest thing, latest mischief, latest accomplishment you or your child have done. We need stories to help us see what living as a disciple is like. We tell our stories and we tell stories of others as examples of a faithful life. That's what it means to be part of a growing, spiritual family. It's one of the reasons why we refer to the church as a family. Our gatherings are a place where we can come and be ourselves as we learn and grow together.

Jesus uses the image of seeds sown and then a time of waiting in Mark 4:26-34. He follows that with a parable using mustard seeds, which are very small. Jesus is really teaching us about the kingdom of God, or in today's terms the kin-dom. We are all kin, siblings of Christ, when we are together, regardless of our origin, language, skin tone, orientation, wealth, class or politics. All are welcome in God's house, God's kingdom, here on earth and in heaven.

"Which is it, Jesus?" Is the kin-dom like a seed germinating unseen or a mustard seed that we tend? Do we stumble across it or set out with a checklist to find it? Does it work in secret, hidden away from our eyes or does it sprout up like a plant and provide shade and protection like a mustard shrub? Is it something common like a seed or questionable like yeast or valuable like a treasure?

I'm sure Jesus would answer with a smile and nod of the head. Then he'd tell us we are like scribes bringing up something old and something new. And we'd throw up our hands and grumble. When we pressed him and shouted out, "Which is it? This or that?" Jesus would say, "yes." You know he would. With a laugh, he'd say, "Yes. That's it exactly!"

Jesus wouldn't be saying it just to be funny. He'd say it because it was the truth. He'd say it because it was the best answer. Is it a pearl or a net or a seed or a treasure hidden in a field or yeast hidden in three measures of flour? Yes, it is that exactly!!

Talking to Jesus can be exhausting. You think he's out to confuse you. We keep skipping over those verses where it says he said nothing except in parables. I think we skip them because they make it sound as if Jesus

was just messing with us, and we don't like that. But the truth is, Jesus really wants us to see. He really wants us to understand. We just can't do it by thinking the way we usually think.

We have to learn to look under our noses and off to the horizon at the same time. We have to learn to see the ordinary and the spectacular all together. We have to learn to experience the everyday and the once-in-a-lifetime in the same moment. We need to see deeper and trust more completely. We need to value what the world throws away and throw away what the world thinks most valuable.

The kin-dom asks us to turn upside down, to stretch and reach and get outside of ourselves long enough to really see the wonder of the universe in a tiny seed. It's the seed of faith. But most important - at least it seems to me to be most important – we're supposed to do it with joy. That's what it means to grow into the new creation.

We are to see life and the kin-dom of God in all its multifaceted beauty, in all its diverse wonder. Just when we think we've got it nailed down, it slips away and appears in another guise, another face. And we are surprised, blessed and overwhelmed with the amazing grace of God which blesses us in such an amazing way.

The joy is that we can grow, as a person and as a household within the community of faith. As a new creation, as a tiny seed, we can grow. There is always more for us to realize, more for us to live into - not as a burden, not as a duty, but as the joy of discovering more Christ. That's why we gather to share our stories and the stories of our households. It's why we gather to hear the stories of others, particularly those in our community who don't have a place where they feel welcome to do so.

We are making disciples. Not have made, not done with that disciple-thing, not wondering whether to. We are making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And we are making them out of ourselves and our neighbors and the world God loved so much. Step by step, branch by branch, we grow into the new creation.

I invite you to join us on the journey. You and your family will be glad. Jesus makes all of our lives together better in every way.

Mark 4:26-34 (CEB)

Then Jesus said, “This is what God’s kingdom is like. It’s as though someone scatters seed on the ground, then sleeps and wakes night and day. The seed sprouts and grows, but the farmer doesn’t know how. The earth produces crops all by itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full head of grain. Whenever the crop is ready, the farmer goes out to cut the grain because it’s harvesttime.”

He continued, “What’s a good image for God’s kingdom? What parable can I use to explain it? Consider a mustard seed. When scattered on the ground, it’s the smallest of all the seeds on the earth; but when it’s planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all vegetable plants. It produces such large branches that the birds in the sky are able to nest in its shade.”

With many such parables he continued to give them the word, as much as they were able to hear. He spoke to them only in parables, then explained everything to his disciples when he was alone with them.