

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως: Proper 6-B (13 June 2021)

St. Thomas', Glassboro

The Rev. Todd Foster

Time-stamp: <2021-06-10 Thu 08:34>

Collect

Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

1 Samuel 15:34-16:13, Psalm 20, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10,[11-13],14-17, Mark 4:26-34

1 Sunday School

Today we finished our annual Sunday School program. Our children finished up a whole year and more spent attending Sunday School and Children's Chapel combined into a single hour online every Sunday at 9am. Our youth group has been meeting online, too, on Sunday evenings. Attendance at both Sunday School and Youth Group has actually gone up since they last met in person. Our adults finished up a Wednesday night study of the book of Ruth, also online. Gathering online has some small advantages – the commute is very short and you can bring your breakfast with you. But it's also a challenging way to build community or to engage in learning. I am tremendously proud of how St. Thomas' has met this pandemic and its restrictions head-on, adapting and making necessary compromises so that we could continue to pursue formation and life together in whatever ways were available to us. Barbara, Gretchen, Barbara, Kathy, Jo-Ann, Daniel, Cole, and others have done amazing things in this past year and a half – as have many more of you who chose to participate in what was offered or to help our children participate.

2 Seeds

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus talks about the work of the Kingdom of God by using two different parables about seeds. These parables remind me very much of our formation efforts at St. Thomas'. Formation means making change, and human beings, human hearts, require time and space and safety in order to change. Quick, violent changes can be destructive, or at least disorienting and challenging. That's like the experience of surgery, and the long process of healing, rehabilitation, and finding a "new normal" for our bodies. But the Kingdom of God, says Jesus, is not like that. Instead it's like a seed that a sower casts upon the ground. God is at work in that seed day and night, while the farmer just waits, doing other things, until that seed sprouts, grows, matures, and is finally ready for the harvest. This is the work of formation: casting seeds upon the soil of all our hearts, and then going about our business while we wait for God to nurture and develop those seeds into something new and nourishing.

Our other scriptures all point to this same hidden, inner, secret work. In our first reading, Samuel is listening to God in order to anoint a new king for Israel. He sees a fine looking man and says, "here's the new king!" But God warns Samuel not to judge by *outward appearances*; God has someone else in mind, chosen for the nature of his *heart*.

In our Psalm, we read that “Some put their trust in chariots and some in horses, * but we will call upon the Name of the LORD our God.”¹ In other words, the people of God don’t rely on the visible symbols of security, symbols of violent strength chosen by our neighbors. Instead we rest in confidence that our *in - visible* God holds us in God’s hands.

In the epistle reading, Paul says we walk by faith and not by sight.

And finally, coming back to the Gospel, Jesus talks about how the mustard seed, that which was considered the smallest of all garden seeds, has hidden inside the potential for a plant so big and strong that even the birds would find rest on its branches.

3 Sunday School

So we get to measure who we are as a church not by the visible signs of success, how prominent we are in our community. But instead by the seeds we are planting, hiding God’s potential in the hearts and minds of each person that we encounter.

The great thing about planting seeds is that they are tiny, simple, lightweight, yet contain astonishing potential inside. The seeds we plant will be grown by God into things that are huge, impactful, world-changing, often in ways that our imaginations are too small even to comprehend. Because it is God who gives the growth, that growth will be all out of proportion with either the seed that was planted or the effort that went into planting it.

And in the end it’s important to remember: those seeds aren’t just little bits of information: Bible verses and creeds and catechisms. Bible verses and creeds and catechisms are simply the protective shells that encode and carry within them the love of God, a love which we experience first of all as the relationships within our parish, our love for one another. Formation is concerned with conveying information, but at its heart formation is about relationships that we have with one another, and through one another, with God.

So thank you to everyone who participated in our Formation programming this past year, whether children or adults, students or teachers. Because we all learned, we all were formed, even as we each brought our own special gifts of asking questions, answering questions, and wondering together about unknowable things.

Because St. Thomas’ is a church, not a chapel, our work of formation continues even this summer, with events for children and adults, as we look forward to resuming more consistent weekly programming in the fall. In the meantime, here in the great green growing season of summertime, even as we rest, God is still at work, growing the seeds that have been planted and creating amazing new growth within us, new places for that spiritual dove, the Holy Spirit to perch as she leads us ever deeper into Eternal Life.

Amen.

¹Ps 20.7 BCP