

**SAN MARINO CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Reflections by Pastor Donald Shenk

(Delivered on Father's Day, Sunday, June 17, 2018)

Text: **Mark 4:26-34** (*The Inclusive Bible*)

Jesus said further, "The reign of God is like this: a sower scatters seed on the ground, then goes to bed at night and gets up day after day. Through it all the seed sprouts and grows without the sower knowing how it happens. The soil produces a crop by itself—first the blade, then the ear, and finally the ripe wheat in the ear. When the crop is ready, the sower wields the sickle, for the time is ripe for harvest."

Jesus went on to say, "What comparison can we use for the reign of God? What image will help to present it? It is like a mustard seed which people plant in the soil: it is the smallest of all the earth's seeds, yet once it is sown, it springs up to become the largest of shrubs, with branches big enough for the birds of the sky to build nests in its shade."

Using many parables like these, Jesus spoke the message to them, as much as they could understand. Everything was spoken in parables, but Jesus explained everything to the disciples later when they were alone.

Pastor Pastor's Reflections: "Planting the Seeds"

Father's Day Prayer

God, I'm praying for fathers –
fathers, up at night with newborns,
fathers, bent under college debt,
fathers who are good with one age of child and haven't a clue with another.

I'm praying for fathers
balancing self and home and work
and parenting, especially
when no one seems to notice.

I'm praying for fathers of adolescents.
and for those who are adolescents themselves, as well as many who prop up their
elbows
when their hands slip
on the gift of accountability.

I'm praying for
grandfathers and transfathers.
godfathers and grieving fathers,
foster fathers and adopting fathers,
solo fathers and step-fathers,

fathers-in-law and fathers-in-neighbor,
more grandfathers –
tiptoeing around divorce,
and also teachers, pastors,
coaches, counselors
who mix a tiny bit of what they know
from fathering into relationships
with dozens of children,
and learn the rhythm of stepping back.

I'm praying for those living
with their mistakes as fathers—
small thoughtlessnesses
that call for self-forgiveness,
or deep damage
needing repentance, transformation.

I'm praying for those who want
to be fathers,
and those who have wanted,
but it never happened.

I'm praying for those
who miss their fathers
because of death or distance,
deep difference or disappearance.

and I'm praying for those who miss their children
because of death or distance,
deep difference or disappearance.

Be a parent to them, O God,
on this day and
all the days of the year.

I am praying for those
who have been so violated by men
in relationship to them,
that the very name
“father” is a wound.

Heal them with time and anger,
memory, love and support.

As we approach this civic day
with its tangle of knotted emotions,
draw out for each of us
from your fathoms of tenderness
care and strength,
for our most intimate needs –
named here,
barely whispered to ourselves,
or still hidden
in the cave-rooms of our souls.
Amen.

That's a prayer written by the wondrous Canadian author Maren Taribasi. I know it's a bit long, but it's so comprehensive in thinking about all the ways we father in this world and all the variations on fatherhood there can be in our lives – from the great joy of a loving, stable father/child relationship to one fraught with disappointment and grief, betrayal and woundedness.

Whether we claim a father or someone who ACTED as a father in our lives, we all have had at least a biological one. Someone who literally planted the seed that led to our being born. But as we know it takes so much more to be a good, loving, nurturing father than that one act! The seeds of love, kindness, instruction, wisdom and understanding are far more important in growing a rich, strong human being.

In the relating of our two parables for today, Jesus gives us an excellent example of how to be a father in the way he instructed his disciples and all of us as the master teacher – always finding new ways to communicate the message and understanding the difference between learning styles so that all could truly hear and progress to the next level of their spiritual growth. It's something like watching a small sprout in time-lapsed photography as it emerges from the ground and pushes out its first leaf.

I love the phrases Lester read from *The Inclusive Bible* – “Jesus spoke the message to them as much as they could understand,” and “Jesus explained everything to the disciples later when they were alone.”

Do you hear the intimacy in those verses; the fatherliness of a caring teacher, wanting to make sure all of his children are getting it and are able to absorb the beauty of what He has for them?

And what a beautiful message it is. Helping them to understand God's kin-dom Jesus gives them an example they know intimately from the agrarian society in which they would have been raised.

How about this, he seems to be saying, God's realm is like that of a gardener who throws the seed on the soil and keeps faithfully at it day after day, making sure to rest night after night. You see, there is nothing more for the gardener to do than to tend the

soil and make sure the weeds don't choke out the new growth. The rich earth God created produces the crop by itself without the sower or the plant worrying and fretting over it. And when it is ready, the gardener cuts it down and uses it for so many things.

Or how about this – you may think you have to do fantastic things, really big things, HUGE ego-boosting things to make a difference in this world and to bring about the kin-dom of God, but I'm telling you that if you can just have enough faith as the tiniest little mustard seed, you can grow something that nurtures, shelters and provides for all those who would come to it – maybe even through a rainbow colored door.

Be the seed, plant the seed, sow the seeds of love, faith and hope. They're needed now more than ever. Don't shy away or think that your seeds of faith and kindness are too small or too insignificant to make any difference. Especially when you join them with the seeds of all of God's realm, you'll be amazed at what can grow here.

Which leads us right into YOUR time to share for this Father's Day. Thank you for bringing in pictures of your father or father figure. I wonder if you have anything you'd like to share about a Dad in your life whether you brought in a picture of him or not. Is he someone who maybe sowed seeds in your life? It doesn't even have to be that specific, just raise your hand if you'd like to share.

(A number of people shared. Here's what Pastor D had to say.)

Certainly my father sowed many seeds in my life. He was certainly nurturing the idea of being a teacher and a minister long before I wanted to have anything to do with either calling. I'm also thinking of my Grandpa Brackbill, my Mama's Daddy, who sowed seeds throughout his life, encouraging each of us grandchildren to contemplate our place in God's kingdom and what we could do to bring about the fullness of it.

Here's another beautiful piece from Maren to close out this time together.

“Seeds Everywhere.”

And so it was seeds everywhere
in Jesus sweet, dangerous
experiment of telling parables
and trusting people to hear
with their minds and hearts
more than their ears.

A story also in the other gospels
laid out the predictable relationship
between soil and abundance
and could be a wisdom tale
of any tradition,
and there is the remarkable
but familiar proposition
that tiny things

carry the greatest influence
when all that's grand, loud and big
has been forgotten.

But then a third parable,
told only by Mark is called
the parable of the
seed growing secretly.
Jesus claims that — No
we really don't know how or why
some faith grows —
sometimes it can spring up
when soil and weather are all wrong.

That's the parable I believe,
because people I know
with deepest faith —
got planted in a hard place,
have to fight for every drop of rain
and forkful of manure,
hoe their own weeds, duck crows,
get trampled and thorned
every time.
and still spread their branches
to welcome the world.

Amen.