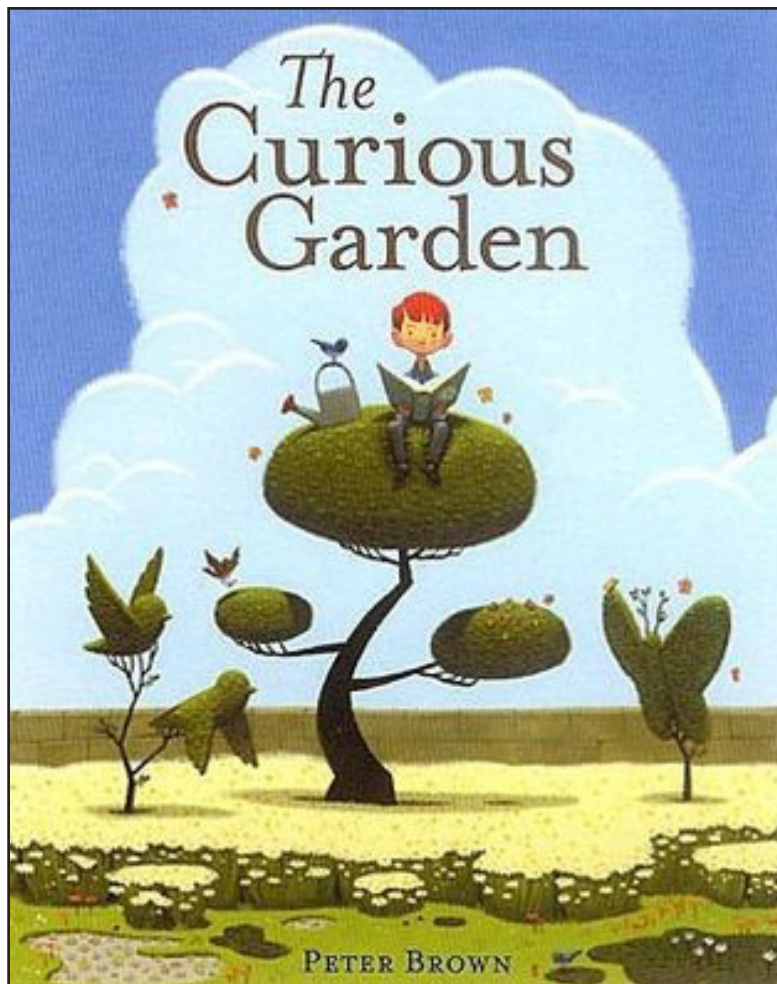


Living Grace

Cycle C 27th Sunday
Ordinary Time

“THERE IS NO STOPPING THE FEROCIOUS GROWTH
OF TRUE FAITH”



*In **The Curious Garden**, we learn about one boy's quest for a greener world...one garden at a time. While out exploring one day, a little boy named Liam discovers a struggling garden, sees its potential, and decides to take care of it. As time passes, the garden spreads throughout the dark, gray city, transforming it into a lush, green world. What is more amazing is that the beauty of the gardens bring the city's residents out of the isolation and into community as they nourish the dream that began with a single boy!*



CLOSE-UP PHOTOGRAPH OF MUSTARD SEED, BROKEN OPEN

EXPLORING THE ART:

Nature photography is a wide range of photography taken outdoors and devoted to displaying natural elements such as landscapes, wildlife, plants, and close-ups of natural scenes and textures. Nature photography tends to put a stronger emphasis on the aesthetic value of the photo than other types of photography such as photojournalism and documentary photography, thereby capturing the beauty and art of God's creation. Nature photographs are published in scientific, travel, and cultural magazines and journals. It can also be purely art to be displayed and enjoyed. Well known nature photographers include Ansel Adams, Eliot Porter, Frans Lanting, Galen Rowell, and Art Wolfe.

THE WISDOM OF NATURE

Over and over Jesus uses examples from nature in his teaching to explain the complex concept of the Kingdom of God. He illustrates that while the Kingdom of God seems to be a difficult concept to understand (mostly because it is so different than the earthly kingdoms of the past and present), it is actually as simple and profound as planting a seed and watching it grow. This is a process that even preschool children can participate in, observe, and discover wonder.

Although societal norms, customs, and religious practices always change with the times, Jesus used references to the never-ending natural processes of God's creation, so that every generation would be able to access and explore the words and wisdom of God.

Living Grace

READ-ALoud STORY



ABIDE IN ME

Vicki Shuck, Esperanza Arts

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love.

~ John 7:7-9

Read-aloud video link:

THE CURIOUS GARDEN

Written & Illustrated by Peter Brown

Sunday Gospel

LUKE 17:5-10

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."

The Lord replied,

"If you have faith the size of a mustard seed,

you would say to this mulberry tree,

'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

"Who among you would say to your servant

who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field,

'Come here immediately and take your place at table'?

Would he not rather say to him,

'Prepare something for me to eat.

Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink.

You may eat and drink when I am finished'?

Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded?

So should it be with you.

When you have done all you have been commanded,

say, 'We are unprofitable servants;

we have done what we were obliged to do.'"

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

TRUE FAITH BRINGS EXPONENTIAL GROWTH, TRANSFORMING THE VOIDS OF BROKEN PLACES AND PEOPLES INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

What is unique about this parable is that the apostles, who are Jesus' closest friends, initiate the inquiry. They are beginning to understand that the path Jesus is on will lead to a sacrifice. They are fearful and questioning as to how they will be able to carry through with the mission. Jesus reassures them with the concept of strength and the "wildness" of true faith. Just like the mustard seed, their faith will spread rapidly and take root quickly. It will be strong and hard to root out. He then shifts to speaking to them as leaders. He begins to lay out what will be required of them in being a true leader in the kingdom of God. It is very different than what the world expects.

The servant in the story stays within the expected protocol of his role. That will not work as a leader of true faith. They will have to be intuitive, have to serve others, and go beyond what is expected. That is how true faith works - it goes beyond expectations. It brings radical change and gets attention. It wild, contagious, and fruitful!

In our children's story, Liam acts as a person of true faith. He goes beyond what is expected. He acts on an inspiration and has the ability to see something new - a city covered in green. To see "what is yet to be" is true faith. He can see the potential of beauty, nourishment, love, and grace before it is there. His act of faith brings transformational growth for the whole city. Liam's story of faith illustrates what the faith of a mustard seed is like. With this kind of personally-inspired faith, the world will grow from dryness, darkness, and hard-hearted isolation, to a world fully alive in its potential. This way calls forth a world alive with a new dynamic of energy, life, and love.

Trees grow on land and not in the sea as in the reference to the mulberry tree. The Old Covenant had been only for the Jewish people, not the salvation of the whole world. What is required now? Jesus calls forth a faith that spreads everywhere and needs very little to get rooted and blossom.

This is a new path in which God's love overrules and grows in all kinds of unexpected places, and the results are transformational! And beautiful! That is the power of true faith. It all begins with a seed. Even the smallest seed of faith can grow to become enormous.

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: The apostles were Jesus's closest friends. What kind of projects, mission or sports are you involved in with your friends? How important is it to have friends or teammates to carry out a mission? Can a quarterback win a game without his teammates knowing how to play?

Have you ever planted seeds or small plants in a garden? What did you have to do to make them grow? Look at the picture of the seed. What happens if it does not break open?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: What makes Liam special? Who or what does he follow? Liam sees a need and some potential. Did Liam follow the rules, or his heart? What did Liam do to make a difference? Who inspired him to do what he did?

THE GOSPEL STORY: What is the message that Jesus is trying to get through to his apostles? What kind of faith is being required of them? Like the barren land, and the seed, the old way had to be broken. When apostles ask Jesus how they can have more faith, Jesus encourages them to go beyond what is expected. To grow in faith we have to be able to perceive the needs around us and respond. How can this make a difference?

It takes grace and faith to believe that a nut will grow into a tree. It also takes being broken open. With the law we stay hardened and in our old ways. In a seed, transformational growth only comes through being broken. How do we grow in transformational ways? How might it change the world around us?

Biblical Background

LUKE 17:5-10

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: The Gospel this weekend is part of a larger teaching of Jesus at the that beginning of Luke chapter 17. In this chapter, Jesus is moving even closer to Jerusalem where he will suffer, die, be buried, and rise on the other side of the grave. In this Gospel, Jesus is making his final journey to Jerusalem. It begins back in chapter 10 and ends with the crucifixion on the Mount of Olives in chapter 19. In this setting Jesus is revealed as the "Master Teacher", as he continues to teach the hard truths of the Gospel to his "graduate students", the apostles, who are following him to the Holy City.

TERMS: Disciples The word means "learner" or student. By this time in the Gospel most, if not all, of the disciples have been with him and experienced his healing, preaching, and teaching ministry for more than two years.

Apostles This word means "one who is sent". These are the star students of Jesus. They want an increase of faith - you would think that they have it all by now! They are not only disciples of Jesus, but they have grown into a deep abiding friendship and trust. They are the leadership team that Jesus will be turning over his mission to. Most likely, this teaching is directed to help them realize the type of leaders they need to become - leaders that go beyond what is expected, intuitively meet the needs of "the master" and his plan, and do the work to further the mission, growing the Kingdom of God.

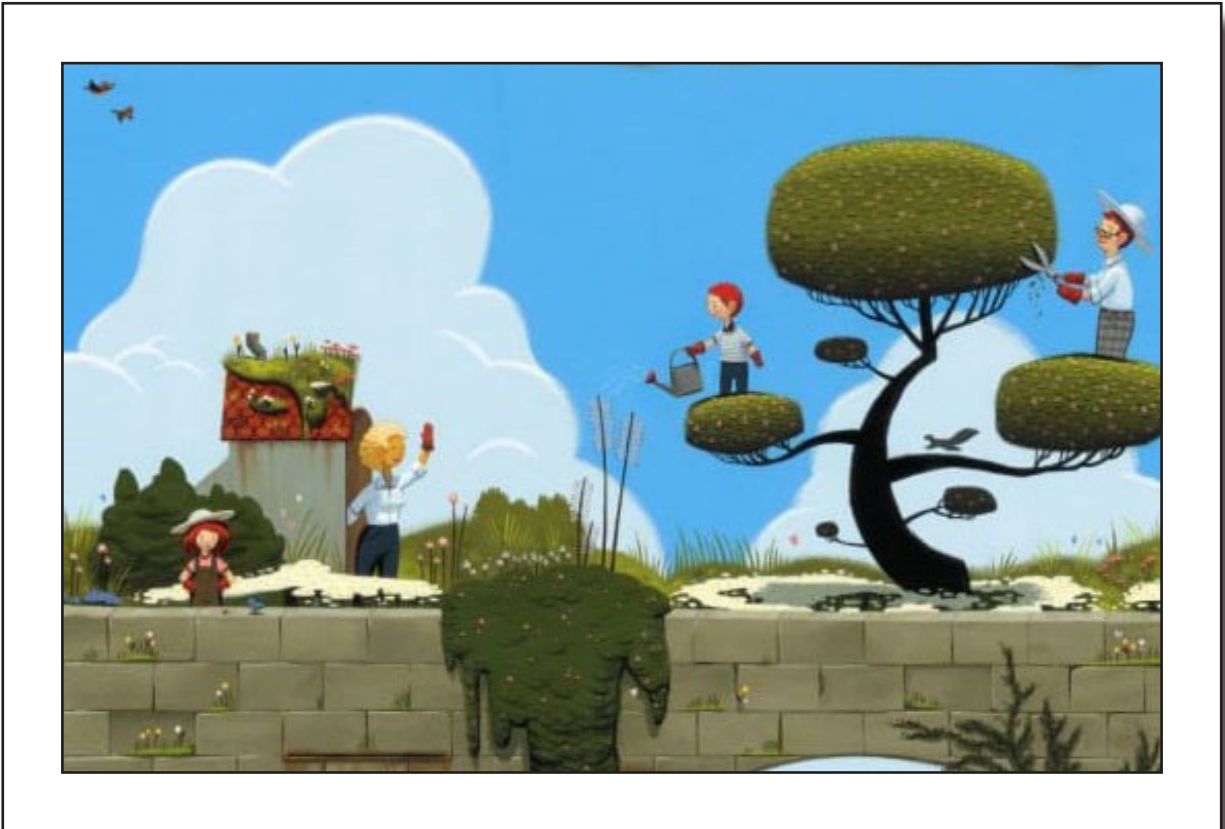
Mustard Seed This is not the smallest seed in the world, but the smallest seed planted in Israel. Famous not for the size of the seed, but rather because of the irony that from such a small seed, such a large bush will grow so fast. The seed goes in the ground and the bush takes over the field almost overnight (so it seems to the farmer to whom it can invade like an out of control weed).

CULTURAL INSIGHT: Farming and tending the flock were the two basic occupations of servants, going all the way back to Cain and Abel. Cain is a man of the field, and Abel is a man of the flocks. Jesus encourages his apostles to serve with honor, not as one who is privileged like the other religious leaders of the day who think only of themselves, but to serve as one who goes beyond what is required. That is how the Kingdom of God grows - service inspired by love, not by enforcing the rules.

INSIGHT INTO MEANING: The first century farmer spent countless hours trying to get rid of the mustard plant in his fields. Thus the kind of growth Jesus is referring to is strong, fast, and ferocious. Jesus wants us to take very seriously the call to grow the Kingdom of God. It is the Kingdom that saves people and the world from droughts of love, grace, beauty, and friendship. Jesus speaks to the disciples and the apostles and lets them know that they are his servants, and that means they are members of his household. They will be the leaders of the church and need to learn to lead from this "servant" perspective. All followers, especially the Apostles, need to know how to go beyond the minimum requirements, to intuitively grow the Kingdom of God. This is the kind of faith that is required - they plant, and then God's grace will do the rest. There is no personal glory in this work. At the end of the day, these "graduate students" of Jesus need to know they have only done their required duty up to this point, and Jesus is yet to be impressed. Faith demands our own initiative to enter into the intimate dialogue with the Father just as Jesus has. That is, a faith and relationship with God is inspired not by the just following the rules, but by love, relationship, and sacrifice.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: Identify a place or a person where you see dryness. Together as a family use your imaginations to create what it would look like if it sprung into new life? Is there a way you could plant a new seed, or water dormant ones?

GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES: **INSPIRED HEART**
SERVANT LEADERSHIP

FAMILY ACTIVITIES: 1) Make a chart of household chores. For one week, practice going beyond what is required of you. Discuss at the end of week the growth in your family as a result. 2) Research where you can find community gardens in your area and volunteer. Or plant a vegetable garden together in your own backyard. Chart daily the growth and the sacrifices it takes to care and cultivate a garden. Also chart the rewards.