

The Rev. Joel Petruschke  
Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
Pentecost 3  
June 13, 2021

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

So, sisters and brothers in Christ, on the island of Spitsbergen north of Norway's mainland, there is a most unusual storage facility.

Spitsbergen, if we didn't know, is part of the Svalbard archipelago between Norway and the North Pole.

Spitsbergen is one of the world's northernmost permanently inhabited areas.

Spitsbergen also boasts of the northernmost airport in the world with scheduled public flights.

PAUSE

Now, before you go home today to book your vacation to Spitsbergen, you probably want to know.

What is there to do on the island of Spitsbergen, for I can assure you that people don't go to this island to lay out on the beach in their swimsuit?

No, Spitsbergen is not known for its tropical beaches.

But Spitsbergen does apparently boast of a beautiful, scenic landscape.

And Spitsbergen, as I noted, is also home to a unique storage facility called the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault, which as the name suggests, is a vault containing numerous types of seeds.

Indeed, this global seed vault stores over a million samples of important food plants such as beans, wheat and rice.

It holds the most diverse collection of food crop seeds in the world.

Each sample contains approximately 500 seeds in an air-tight aluminum bag.

And by storing the seeds in a location with permafrost it is ensured that the seeds will stay frozen, even if a power outage should occur.

The site also offers a stable political and geological location and well-established infrastructure, since the seed storage is located only 1 kilometer from the local Svalbard airport.

Why store seeds on Spitsbergen? Because the freezing temperature stops the seeds from developing, delays seed aging and makes it possible to store seeds for many years.

If ever needed, the seeds can be thawed and used for planting.

And it was such that this seed vault was established so that gene banks worldwide could store duplicate samples of their seeds, and by doing so, ensure that food crop varieties would not be lost in local or global crises like war, terrorism or natural catastrophes.

To be sure, almost every country in the world has a store of seeds in the Svalbard vault.

PAUSE

Now, I share all this with you this morning, because I couldn't help but think of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, when I read our gospel reading for this morning.

Jesus says, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

Yes, when I read this parable about the mustard seed, I immediately thought of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

And I couldn't help but wonder if the mustard seed is stored in the facility.

We can't imagine why it wouldn't be, right?

And then I thought about what God might think of humanity's invention of a seed vault.

Would God think that humanity was pretty ingenuous?

Would God think, “You know that is pretty good stewardship on the part of humans. I have to give them credit.”

“That is pretty good foresight on the part of humans to have a safeguard against the lost of important crops.”

But then I also wondered if God would not be a bit saddened by the fact that humans have to go to the effort to create a safeguard.

I wondered if God would not be saddened by the fact that humans have to make a seed vault because of the possibility of a terrorist act, or a war—these human-made catastrophes.

Even a natural disaster easily falls under the category of “human-made” when we think of global warming, and sea-level rise.

And so as ingenuous as the seed vault may be, it is sad that we humans even need to have to resort to such a thing.

But at least humanity is taking into consideration all dire possibilities, and making appropriate contingency plans.

At least humanity is thinking ahead.

PAUSE

With all this said, Friends, it is fascinating that the kingdom of God, or we might say the gospel of God, is compared to seeds.

It is fascinating what we read in our lesson from Mark today.

In other words, it is fascinating that the gospel, like so much seed, is planted in the world.

The gospel is depicted as sown in the world.

All the more, the gospel is sown in God’s people.

And sometimes that seed of the gospel germinates.

Sometimes that seed of the gospel falls into good soil, and that seed takes root, and that seed begins to grow, and it flourishes becoming a hearty plant.

Sometimes the seed of the gospel sprouts and grows.

PAUSE

And sometimes, well, that seed of the gospel fails to produce.

Sometimes the seed of the gospel doesn't germinate, or if it does, it soon withers and dies.

Yes, the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ is equated to seed, and it is deposited inside each of us like some seed sample that is deposited in the Svalbard Global Seed Bank.

But unlike the seed samples in the global seed bank, the gospel is not to be locked up inside us for safe keeping until some future day when it might be needed.

No, the Lord knows the gospel is needed, needed right now.

The Lord knows we must sow the seed of good news in the world today.

It is not something that should be hidden away, squirreled away in some facility in a remote place.

The good news is not something that should be buried deep inside us, never to be revealed.

The gospel needs to be sown generously, needs to be dispersed lavishly, needs to be strewn throughout the world unsparingly.

For what is a seed after all?

What is a seed? But a package of potential.

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, that is all that a seed is.

It is a container, in which are the blueprints for making a plant, which in turn makes more seeds.

A seed is potential all wrapped up nice and neat inside a casing.

And if we take this analogy a step further, we can understand ourselves, we human beings as no different from a seed, that we are but individual packages of potential.

PAUSE

And all this talk of human potential makes me think of that Geico commercial, you know the one, where Pinocchio plays the role of motivational speaker.

Pinocchio says, "I look around this room and I see nothing but untapped potential."

And then points to a person in the audience, and he says, "You have potential."

And Pinocchio's nose begins to grow.

"And you have po...tent...ial." And Pinocchio suddenly realizes his nose is growing.

And there are audible sighs from the audience, and Pinocchio says in a most awkward mumble, "Aah, o boy."

And yes, 15 minutes can save you 15% on car insurance.

But the truth is, that is exactly what the human being is.

The human being is but a ball of profound potential, wrapped up nice and neat inside a casing.

We are all like seeds, because we all contain a source of immense potential.

PAUSE

A seed may grow into a great big beautiful plant, bursting forth with flowers, or grain, or fruit of some other kind.

In this way, a seed reaches its full potential.

In like manner, a human being grows and blossoms, and reaches his or her full potential.

And yes that potential may be realized in the vocation of a teacher or educator, an architect or engineer, an administrator or manager, a firefighter or police officer, a Park Ranger or nurse, a mom or dad, you name it.

There are many and varied vocations in life, and all of them have purpose and all of them glorify God.

All of them glorify God, if...if...IF those vocations are performed in love.

You see, Friends, this is the potential that is planted within each one of us.

It is the potential to embody the gospel, the love of Christ, in whatever position we have been called to in the world.

And so, it is not so much the vocation that makes one great in eyes of God.

Yes, persons who have risen to lofty positions like CEOs of companies, or Department Heads in Hospitals, or Presidents of Universities.

These persons might be said to have reached their full potential and then some.

But, this is the epitome of potential in the eyes of the world.

But, God is more interested in our potential to love, God is more interested in our capacity to be generous and grace-filled.

And the person who may have a menial job but who displays great love in their work and in their life has reached their full potential, more so than someone in some high powerful job who is self-absorbed, and has not of grain of love in them.

PAUSE

The apostle Paul described the potential in the human being in this way.

If I speak in the tongues of mortals, and of angels, but do not have love, I am noisy gone or a clanging symbol.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

And if I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

If I run a Fortune 500 Company, and make millions of dollars, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I have an IQ of 160, and if I exceed all others in knowledge in my chosen field of study, and if I have performed groundbreaking work, having published books and journal articles, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I have fame and glory, if I am renowned in the world, if my name is a household name, but do not have love, I am nothing.

Love is patient, kind, not envious, or boastful, or rude. Love is not self-serving, irritable, or resentful. Love is selfless, merciful, compassionate, and generous.

Love is the potential that resides in each one of us.

Love is the gospel-in-action. Love is the gospel come to full ripeness. Love is God's seed planted in you and me.

And our greatness is not measured in our potential to be powerful, wealthy, famous, or celebrated in this world.

Our potential is not measured by what position we obtain in life.

No, our potential is measured by love.

We can all aspire to be a great many things in this world, but whatever position we achieve, if we do not have love, we are nothing.

PAUSE

Ultimately then, what is contained in that global seed vault in Svalbard?

Yes, seeds, and yes, potential.

But even more so, the Svalbard Global Seed Vault stores hope for humanity should ever a dire catastrophe decimate the food crops we rely on. That seed vault on that remote island off Norway stores hope.

And that translates well to what God has planted in us, as God's people.

We embody hope for the world, because we are called to make God's love known in the world.

We make God's love known in a world, where mercy and compassion for another human being is oftentimes a hard found reality.

We make God's love known in the world, and by doing so we offer a much needed blessing upon a weary world, short on hope. Thanks be to God. Amen.