

Very small amount has a very huge impact on the dough. . . So here is a mustard seed – so small, most of you just have to take my word that I am actually holding something. . . But this very small seed – grows into a large bush – big enough for the “birds of the sky to come and dwell in its branches.”

Now I will be honest with you and admit that I have never baked bread in my life --- but I’m pretty sure yeast works the same as a mustard seed And Jesus says this is how God’s love, God’s mercy, God’s kingdom comes into our lives --- it begins very small but grows into something great. That’s not to say that *sometimes* God doesn’t come into our lives in a big and spectacular way – it’s just to say if we’re always looking for the extraordinary – we may miss the very ordinary. . .

So when I was a boy growing up in my parish of St. Joseph in Southern Indiana – [because it was on top of a hill – it was always called --- St. Joe Hill ----] -on Friday nights during Lent – we always had Stations of the Cross, followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. That was a Lenten devotion my mother always chose to go to --- and for several years, I was the only one in my family who chose to go with her. Because I was usually the only person there under the age of 50 – which sounded ancient then, but doesn’t sound so bad these days ---- I would always get to serve at that devotion --- so I carried the processional cross leading Father around the Church—always being sure I got us started in the right direction (clockwise in our church – rather than counter clock-wise) – stopping for the prayers at each station. And then I would get to use the thurible (the swinging incense pot) during Benediction. I loved the smell of the incense that would permeate my clothes after Benediction. Loved it so much I would put those same clothes back on/ on Saturday morning – just so I could go around all day smelling myself.

And in my little 10 or 11 year old mind --- I began to think to myself – now if I were to become a priest – I could smell like this all the time! Little did I know that being a priest entails much more than just smelling like incense. Pope Francis tells us we are supposed to smell like the sheep – which is a bit harder to achieve. . . then just swinging incense. . . But that smell of incense -- was the beginning of my mind and heart-- turning toward God – and listening --- for a call to priesthood. A small seed and really – a very insignificant seed --- was being planted. I sometimes joke and say -- I smelled my vocation to priesthood – rather than heard it!

Now there of course were others seeds and lots of people along the way nurturing those seeds --- **but who knows**, perhaps if I enjoyed the smell of alcohol as much as I did incense – I might have become a doctor or a nurse – or a bartender.

I’m pretty sure the 3-4 years in high school I spent cleaning out my neighbor’s hog barns every week – may have had a negative impact on me pursuing hog-farming as a career (nothing against hogs – Carl Stein) --- but I did consider farming as a real possibility at one point in my life – who doesn’t like the smell of a freshly plowed field or the smell of a hay-field that has just been mowed – my humble opinion of course. Or who knows – IF I had baked bread as a child and had the experience of kneading yeast into dough – perhaps I would have been a baker or a pastry chef!!

Seeds – they are planted in us –and we plant them in others. *Seeds of mercy and seeds of justice – grow in the kingdom of God.*

Calvin did it to us again last week – set the stage for this Sunday. . .

During my years in college, and graduate school in the seminary – and then for the 12 years I was in the monastery – so for about 20 years --- I was a member of a volunteer fire department – as a fire-fighter and an EMT --- because all of those places where I lived --- were in small, rural communities. Now ironically, I also enjoy the smell of wood burning. . . although I am content with it being in a fireplace..... So one weekend, some friends of mine were coming for a visit. They had an eleven year old son – and I wondered what we could do to give him some entertainment. . . so I asked some of my friends to take him to the firehouse for the afternoon – and let him play with the siren, and put on some turn-out gear, and give him a ride on one of the trucks or the ambulance.

So here we are probably 30 years later –and that eleven year old boy --- is now a captain in the Kansas City Fire Department --- *because*, he will readily tell you – of the seed planted in him--- by a visit to a fire station in St. Meinrad, Indiana.

Seeds – they are planted in us – and we plant them in others. . . The school district in Little Rock, Arkansas, can thank me for two social studies teachers – and the Benedictine community of Subiaco can thank me for one monk ---- and these are just the full grown plants I am aware of – and I had no idea I was even planting those seeds --- and that’s a big point I want to make...

Whether we know it or not – whether we care to admit it or not --- we are always sowing seeds – because people are watching our actions and listening to our words. . . So, through our words and actions – are we sowing seeds of compassion – or seeds of strife and discord? --are we sowing seeds of understanding – or seeds of rumor and dishonesty? -- are we sowing seeds of truth – or seeds of falsity that come from gossip and hearsay?

Through our words and actions – are we sowing seeds of love – or seeds of hatred and mistrust?

You see, every day when we get up in the morning – we have a decision to make. We can purposefully and intentionally decide what kind of seeds we are going to sow --- those of the kingdom of heaven, OR those of a kingdom of our own making. . .

Remembering all along the message of last week’s Gospel – some of the seeds we sow – are going to fall on the hard soil of other people’s hearts and not grow. Some among the rocks where they can’t take root. And some among the thorns – that will choke them off.

But some seeds, some WILL fall on good soil, and produce fruit of a hundred, or sixty, or thirty-fold

Our calling as Christians--- is not to worry about the results of our sowing – God is going to see to that.

No, our callings is simply to go out and sow seeds – and sow them as recklessly and abundantly and extravagantly ---- as God sows his mercy and forgiveness and compassion in our lives. . .

Our calling is to:

Bring forth the kingdom of mercy.

Bring forth the kingdom of peace.

Bring forth the kingdom of justice.

Bring forth the city of God.