

June 16, 2024

Pr. Steve

Texts: Ezekiel 17: 22-24; 2 Corinthians 5: 15-19; Psalm 34; Mark 4: 26-34

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Do some of you remember the movie, **Blazing Saddles**? There's a great scene in there. It's an old Western comedy, right? New sheriff has arrived in town. He's black. He goes out the next day to meet the townspeople, and he is accosted by a little old lady who throws every racial epithet in his face, concluding finally with the 'n' word. He goes to his office to recover, and there Gene Wilder, his sidekick, comes to console him. He says, '*Sheriff, these are simple people. They're people of the earth. They're the salt of the earth, and in their hearts, they know they're good people. ....They're morons.*'

'Ah, the truth! 'They're just morons.'

We're invited into a growing reality—the evolution of love. Elizabeth sent me this quote from Merton, which I put in our Grace Waves on Friday.

*"What is serious to human beings is often very trivial in the sight of God. What in God might appear to us as 'play' is perhaps what God takes most seriously."* [Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*]

If we could just let go of our own obsession with what we think is the meaning of it all, we might be able to begin to hear God's call and follow God in this mysterious Cosmic dance. Can we let go a little bit?

There was a member of Peace years ago named Paul Ditzler. Paul was a gentleman. Have you ever met any gentleman from that previous generation—quiet, distinguished, dapper, caring, likes children, open to the views of others.

And Paul, who was 84 at the time, said to me one day, "Steve, I think we need to take a biology class. And I said, 'Yes, Paul,' because I knew there was something in this. He said, '*The field has grown so immensely; there's so much to learn. I think we should do this together.*' Okay, so he researched getting a teacher for us—took him two months. Finally found a woman at Monte Vista who is pursuing advanced degrees, and we began classes with her for the next five months, every other Tuesday from 4 to 6 p.m. Biology at Monte Vista.

And, at the conclusion of the class, Paul said, '*I can never get over it. You know, you can take any seed on this planet, and you can shave it within a thousandth of an inch all the way through, one millionth of an inch all the way through, and we can never pinpoint life. Yet that very same seed you can plant it anywhere in the world, and given the right conditions, it will grow—it will grow. And not only that it may produce—tomatoes, and mangoes, and avocados—and feed us. The Mystery of Life. Where does it come from?*' Four years later, at the age of 88, he was dying. At our last conversation, Paul from his deathbed said, '*Death, The Great Adventure*'.

Jesus calls it the reign of love, the '*Beloved Community*'. Today Paul calls it the '*New Creation*'. It's here. It's begun. The old order is gone.

The new is here. Can you see it? You see these things at the same time—this abundant richness of life for which we were made—but it can never be pinpointed. And we're trying so desperately to do that, aren't we? *'Just get a grip? That's all I want.'*

It's dynamic, it's on the move, it's evolving—the old order gone. We need the new eyes to see it. The New Creation is happening all around us. *"From now on we judge no one by human standards."* [2 Corinthians 5:16] Ready to give that up? We're no good at it, but we sure insist on it, don't we? We all think we're experts. *"From now on, we don't even hold the faults of other people against them"* [2 Corinthians 5:19] Why should we bother? Who needs that?

*'I'm not going to give up that or you. I'm a religious person. I'm holding onto that desperately. There's so many other people who are worse off than me, I'll tell you that—and I'll give you the list if you want, after church.'*

Loosen the grip. Loosen the grip! Jesus' favorite image for all of this is seeds... growing.

Now we just want to better understand life. That's all we're asking. 'If I could understand myself, or other people, or what's going on in the world, that's all I ask. I don't even ask you to change it anymore. I just want to understand what's happening.' And the Gospel says, 'No.' Jesus says, *'Whether you're awake or asleep, the seeds keep growing. Whether you're working hard or not doing a thing, the seeds of the cosmic dance keep growing. Do you see them? Whether you understand what's going on or not, the seeds keep growing within us around us. Are you ready to open your eyes to see?'* [Mark 4: 26-27].

This is called Sabbath wisdom or awareness. Instead of that tight grip, that desperation to control, we're invited to discover what is beyond words, and explanations, and justifications, and complexifications by which we try to pin everything down in the categories I've made for my life. Which at our death are gone. They are worthless. And Jesus is just trying to warn us in advance. So much of what we want to pin down...is actually boring. Give it up!

The seeds keep growing whether we notice it or not. Could be a mustard seed, and then it's a bush, and we say, 'Where did that come from?' *'The seeds are useless,'* Jesus says, *'unless they fall into the earth and die, and then, then they multiply, and bear fruit, and grow, and feed us.'* And that's what faith is like—plant the seed, let [yourself] die to those things you don't need, the things that are keeping us trapped and bound, held down.

But it's hard. It's *really hard* to loosen the grip—but we know compacted soil like clay will produce nothing. The soil has to be loose. It has to give way. It's got to be free. It wants to move, huh? Everything we're not sure about. *'I came to church to get things put in order. What are you trying to do to me?'*

Well, here are three wisdom seeds, ever so brief.

Gandhi was asked, 'Why do you care about the British. those cruel people they're tormenting us, oppressing us for more than two centuries. They deserve to die.' And Gandhi said, *'Well, if I don't believe in their humanity, they never will.'* Reconciling. That's where it's at—reconciling.

St. Francis was asked, *'Why do you hang out with lepers, they're....lepers!'*  
And he said, *'Well, it's true. Their disease might kill me, but they're good for my soul.'*  
Reconciling.

Jesus was asked, 'What are you gonna do about it? This is a mess.' He said, *'Forgive them  
They're clueless. They don't know what they're doing. They're morons.'*

Reconciling—that's the ministry entrusted to us—we who don't understand it, and resist it like  
crazy, and really don't want to go there. Reconciling Mercy.

Well, the only way to enter the Cosmic dance, the Realm of love, is to love. There's no other  
entrance possible. Awe, gratefulness—yeah, that helps—but love and loving is it.

And that's my Father's Day gift to you—from Jesus, and Francis, and Gandhi, and Paul Ditzler,  
and Thomas Merton—and Mel Brooks.  
Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in the  
reconciling Christ. Amen.