

A Sermon Preached at Maple Street Congregational Church, UCC
Danvers, MA
Rev. Kevin M. Smith
June 17, 2018
Mark 4:26-32

Cascading Moments

The Cascade Mountain range extends from Southern British Columbia in Canada down through Western Washington State, Western Oregon, and into Northern California. I have spent many summers and other times, too, throughout the year hiking, camping, working and traveling throughout the Cascade Mountain range. It is a beautiful place. Lush rain forests, tall mountains, volcanoes, and it hugs the northern coastal waters of the North American continent. It is full of God's beautiful flora and fauna. The people of the Cascade range, or the coastal range, are timber workers, fisherman, farmers, and all varieties of urban workers in Vancouver, BC, Seattle, Portland, and Eugene. Their home is affectionately known as "Cascadia."

They are the Cascade mountains because it is a landscape laced with ribbons of falling, cascading water from the mountain tops into the creeks and rivers which run down to the Pacific Ocean or inland to valleys of the Pacific Northwest. It used to be, but is not so much anymore due to climate change, water that sprung forth from melting ice and glaciers of the alpine elevations. Cool, clear, icy water that cascaded and meandered twisting turning through the rocks down the mountainsides. Back and forth, dropping down here and there and creating gorgeous water falls, some hundreds of feet high, others just a few inches. Cascading shelves of water that create the arteries and veins of the body of Mother Earth. No two twists and turns and falls and eddies are the same, but they are all headed to the same place—the oceans or the valleys from which life is given birth or given a home.

Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Christ, taught his brothers and sisters of the faith using stories. These parables used images they could grasp, could understand. The images were captured from their daily lives. "Scattering seed," "rising night and day," "sprout and grow," "the sickle," "the grain," "the harvest," and the "the mustard seed." The women and men and children of the first century who lived, planted, and harvested in the Galilee would understand these images. Jesus would take these images and paint pictures of what the kingdom of God, as opposed to the kingdom of Caesar, looks like. When Jesus talked about the kingdom of God he wasn't talking about some far-off place in the heavens that

one could only travel to after death. He was talking about an alternative kingdom that was very near and accessible to the families of the Galilee.

In the stories or parables that Jesus is telling that we read about this morning he is describing how God works in and through human beings, how God works through you and me. There is real work and it seems there is a little magic, too. For some of what Jesus describes is actual work people must do—sow the seed, plant the seed, and then let go and allow God to go to work. While Jesus is using images and descriptions that people understand because they are taken from everyday life he is doing so to describe a much more profound lesson about the work of God in the world.

Things happen in sequence. One buys the seed, plants the seed, rain falls on the ground in which the seed is buried, movement and change and growth happen below the surface, until a shoot of green pokes through the surface of the soil and food for life begins to grow up, shooting up toward the sun for nourishment. One moment upon another moment cascades on to the next moment and that cascades one to the next and the next and so on and so on. There is purpose. There is reason. There is a direction. There is health and there are outcomes. Just like the icy, glacial, water cascading down the slope of a mountain, every seed we sow creates an outcome. Small moments cascade upon other small moments to produce an outcome. Outcomes that either can reside in and constitute the kingdom of God or an outcome that does not reflect the image of God.

You and me, sisters and brothers, are all planting seeds. We plant seeds that grow and develop in ways that are not always controlled by us. We plant a seed, or say a word or take an action that cascades into the next stage of growth or life. And, these moments, these stages of development begin a chain reaction that produces outcomes for good or ill.

Because I am a person of faith, I understand that I am not in control of every stage of life that a seed will go through. Because I am a person of faith I believe that even the bad seeds that I sometime plant can cascade into events that may go through troubling stages, may crash against the rocks or may not even move on to the next stage but that because of the love and power of God all be well in the end. But while I am not fully in control of the development of that seed or direction of that cascading stream I am responsible for giving it a healthy start, for saying that word or taking that action with good intent. The seeds we plant will more reflect the kingdom of God if the intent of that planting is born of love, of making peace, of compassion, or done for healing, or joy, or seeking justice.

Your life and my life right now today is the result of seeds that were planted long ago in and by our hearts. Our lives are the result of every decision and action we have made or taken that have been cascading down upon one another that has brought us to this place that we are right here and now. It has been a meandering journey of twists and turn and falls and living in and out of the kingdom of God. May each of our words and moments of life cascade together to water that glorious tree of life in the kingdom of God where all the birds of the air can make their nests and rest in the shade of our branches. May the tiniest act of good will, and love, and truth, and justice making, and forgiveness turn into the greatest of sheltering places for our neighbors. Moment upon moment, action upon action, cascading together as a witness and nurture of the kingdom of God. May it be so. Amen.

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