

A sermon preached at Maple Street Congregational Church,  
United Church of Christ  
Danvers, MA  
Date: April 15, 2018  
Rev. Kevin M. Smith, Pastor  
John 12:23-26

### *God Plants Seeds*

They say that if you plant one seed of corn and that seed grows into a stalk of corn and you then take an ear of corn from that one plant and use all those seeds to plant more stalks of corn, then in just over six years that one seed that you planted will result in “as many seeds as there are human beings on this planet.”<sup>1</sup> Now, I am no mathematician, but I have planted and eaten a lot of corn. I think it’s pretty miraculous that one seed of corn can produce billions of other seeds of corn in such a short time, especially if you consider all the things that can go wrong in the business of growing things. Would I actually call it a miracle? Not today, perhaps, but two thousand years ago, I probably would have believed that it took some pretty amazing divine assistance from God or the gods of earth, rain and sun to multiply the life-giving benefits of that one little seed of corn! Perhaps in thinking about the productive capability of one seed, Jesus thought it was a good metaphor to use when he talked about one grain falling to the earth still having so much potential. Those are words that people of his time, many who made their living off the land, would understand without blinking an eye.

What is even more amazing about the metaphor, or parable, of the seed of grain that Jesus is telling his disciples about is that in order to produce such abundance and productive harvests, the seed must be buried. Jesus is saying that there is something deep inside that little seed that once it is buried or entombed in the soil there is a resurrection of sorts that occurs when from the buried seed and small little green shoot springs forth up out of the soil reaching and straining for the nourishment of the sun. A metamorphosis occurs. Transformation happens. The seed changes physical form and structure and is altered in appearance and character as if by some supernatural event. Of course, now with thousands of years of agricultural science, we know that it is not supernatural at all, but very natural.

Perhaps we can imagine that Jesus is really talking about is the supernatural seed that was planted within him. Jesus grew out of and from God’s divine seed or light. We might say that Jesus sprang forth from a divine seed. We might say that the divine seed within Jesus was probably one of the most, if not the greatest, most

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<sup>1</sup> BurrIDGE, Richard A., “Fifth Sunday in Lent, Year B,” *Lectionary Commentary of the Gospels*. (Grand Rapids, MICH: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 542.

productive divine seeds that God ever planted. Because Jesus was human yet overflowing with divinity, the seed within him can objectively and rationally be considered one of the most productive seeds ever planted in the history of the world. Just consider how many lives over the last two thousand years have been changed and affected by one human being filled with divinity.

A little further on in our lesson from John this morning Jesus says that “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.” (John 12:26). Where I am, there my servant will be also. If you serve Jesus; if you take on the love and nature of Jesus you will be in the same place as he. His productive being and work will become your work. “While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light.” (John 12:36)<sup>1</sup> The Gospel of John says believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light. Jesus tells his disciples and the crowd that they, too, have the potential within them, a divine seed planted within them, which if nurtured and shared with others can be used to spread the divine light of God. Like that one little seed of corn that multiplies over and over and over again to become billions of more seeds, if we can recognize that divine seed within us and choose as Jesus chose to let it flourish within us, we too can be, children of the divine seed or light of God that can change the world.

The author of the Gospel of John, in the first chapter, tells us that “the Word became flesh and lived among us.” (John 1:14) Jesus was the Word or the Logos and the dictionary states that “in Greek thought [is] the divine principle of reason that gives order to the universe and links the human mind with God.”<sup>2</sup> The Word or Logos was with God and the Word was God, John tells us. What makes Jesus—this manifestation of wisdom, this teacher, this model—so special to us is that this divine element of God comes to us in the flesh. The Word is made flesh. This makes the divine seed or light of God accessible to us and allowed God to experience what it means to be us—to be human. It is the aspect of incarnation of God into Jesus which makes God accessible to us. We too often forget that God works through us. God does not have to be disconnected from our daily lives. God’s work in increasing the kingdom can be through us!

Joyce Hollyday, once an editor on *Sojourners* magazine, wrote an article about Clarence Jordan who was a founder of the Koinonia community, which brings black and white, rich and poor people together to work the land, their minds and hearts together. Jordan practiced an incarnational theology that professed that God works through ordinary beings of human flesh, just as Jesus was in the flesh. Jordan was

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<sup>2</sup> See Note John 1:1-18 in *HarperCollins Study Bible* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), p. 2013.

concerned that when you put Jesus on too high a pedestal he becomes unreachable and untouchable to us. Hollyday discussed what Jordan wrote in his “Cotton Patch” gospels:

[She says Jordan wrote that] Jesus has been so zealously worshipped, his deity so vehemently affirmed, his halo so brightly illumined, and his cross so beautifully polished that in the minds of many he no longer exists as a man. He has become an exquisite celestial being who momentarily and mistakenly lapsed into a painful involvement in the human scene, and then quite properly returned to his heavenly habitat. [Now, Clarence Jordan says] “by thus glorifying him we more effectively rid ourselves of him than did those who tried to do so by crudely crucifying him.” Jordan is saying we can distance ourselves from Jesus by putting him on too high a pedestal. Hollyday says that “[Jordan] lived in contradiction to the tendency of those around him to make Christ less than a man by making him more than one.” Hollyday continues by saying that “bringing home the incarnation was the motivation for Clarence's writing, his preaching, and his living. He believed that the incarnation was the only method of evangelization.” Jordan said that “we haven't gotten anywhere until we see the word become flesh.”<sup>3</sup> I agree. Using our God-given reason, compassion, and love to serve God and our neighbors makes the Word become flesh, makes the Word of God come alive in our lives and in the world. I hope that sometime our youth and others from this church can go to Koinonia to experience the dream of Clarence Jordan and hope of God lived out in the flesh on a day-to-day basis.

But, we don't have to go to Koinonia, though, to begin living in the Word of God that is a seed that has been planted in us, too. Live your life deliberately. Every word we speak, every action we take, every dollar we spend, every time we share love rather than hate, we plants the seeds of God's reign on the earth. Love God, love your neighbor, and love yourself. Find that seed and light of God this is within you. Nurture it and let it reach high for the sun! Plant it and let it multiply in the world over and over again. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup>Hollyday, Joyce. “A Scandalous Life of Faith” in *Sojourners*, December, 1979

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