



June 18, 2006

Preaching: Rev. Ronni Sue Verboom

2nd SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
FATHER'S DAY

2 Cor. 5:6-10, 14-17
Mark 4:30-34

“The Gospel of Dad”

When I was a child, my brother, three years older than I, possessed an amazing toy. It was called a “Viewmaster”, and you held it to your eyes, peered into the eyepiece, and were instantly transported to another world. It’s basically a portable system for viewing slides. I was tickled to find one at a church rummage sale that I purchased to keep in my office for my grandson to play with. He has several slide wheels, portraying Clifford the big red dog, Thomas the tank engine, and the saga of the search for Nemo, the clownfish.

When I first peeked into my brother’s Viewmaster, it scared me! He had a series of slides on the Carlsbad Caverns. Caves can be spooky and the three dimensional depiction of those gave me chills. But I would return to it again and again, until finally, MONTHS later, I could look at the caverns and not feel my heart quiver in fear.

There’s something about seeing the world differently that fascinates us. Last week my grandson began wearing a set of green aviator goggles that are part of a Red Baron outfit for his stuffed Snoopy toy. He giggled in delight, running all around the house, peering out the window, gazing at himself in the mirror. “Grammy, I’m green! The house is green! Everything has turned green!”

The Apostle Paul experienced something like this. The Epistle lesson describes his experience of seeing with entirely new eyes, following his blinding encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, and the conversion of his heart. Paul teaches that once we open ourselves to Christ’s reality and spirit, the **WHOLE WORLD CHANGES!** Everything and everyone looks different. *From now on, therefore, we*

regard no one from a human point of view... If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

How do people learn this? How do they draw near to Christ and begin to see with new eyes? How are their lives changed? Christ calls all of us into a new and different world—right now---- today! How is that door opened for us? Who hands us the green goggles? Who passes us the Viewmaster?

Friends, we learn this from other people- from their stories, from parables. The primary storyteller for us is, of course, Jesus. His parables are specifically designed for us to see things in new ways.

Rev. Leonard Sweet points out that often we may find this frustrating: ***Why didn't Jesus come right out and say what he meant? Why did he leave behind all these cryptic sayings, loaded with innuendo, instead of a crisp code of laws or a stack of essays with titles like "How to Be a Good Disciple," "A Brief Definition of the Kingdom of God," or "Seven Key Features of the Kingdom and What This Means to You." But no. Instead we have this cross-eyed, cryptic, incomplete, awkward, and at times seemingly absurd collection of sayings known as Jesus' parables.***

Rev. Sweet goes on to defend Jesus: ***By preaching to his followers in parables, Jesus let each listener make the Good News become his own story, her own experience. As we are swept up in the story, we ourselves become part of a new parable—the parable of our lives. Taken all together, our individual experiences of the kingdom, our personal stories of God's work and witness in our lives, end up creating a new gospel.***

Okay. We learn about God, about his love that came to us in Jesus, through peoples' LIVES. We receive Christ's gospel (good news) from many different people. There's the Gospel according to Grandpa, the Gospel according to Aunt Mary, and the Gospel according to that kid at camp whose name I can't even remember.

We interact with and learn from many gospels, LIVED before us by many different people. Then Christ calls us into a new and different world, where we are given the power to write the message of his love with OUR lives—to BECOME OURSELVES LIVING GOSPELS.

Our second Scripture for today presents one of Jesus' parables- the parable of the mustard seed. Through this parable, Christ teaches we have the power to do amazing things—from the smallest of beginnings (like a little mustard seed) unforeseen growth can occur (a great big bush where birds can roost). But, like the mustard seed, this happens through our CHOICES that need to be made repeatedly. Mustard is an ANNUAL plant. It has to be grown and allowed to go to seed. The seed must be collected and planted again every year, year by year by year.

My hunch is that some of us are thinking—“Ok, Ronni, yeah, I remember a person who was really special- full of goodness. Their life touched mine. I can see that person as a kind of “Gospel”—one who was full of love and good news. When I was with that person, things did look different. Life seemed better, more joyful, more hopeful. But I’M not like that. I’m just a regular person- with a lot of flaws.”

If that’s what you are thinking, or something close to that, all you are telling me is that **YOU ARE A TINY SPECK- JUST A MUSTARD SEED**. Jesus teaches that’s no obstacle to anything. **IF WE CHOOSE TO**, we can grow. And grow. And grow. And become something so far beyond the mustard seed we can’t even imagine it today. We can’t imagine it, because we’re looking at things with the **WORLD’S** eyes. **GOD’S** viewpoint is vastly different. He really wants us to **KNOW**, to begin to **BELIEVE**, that he can work amazing wonders in and through us, if we trust him.

Today’s is Fathers’ Day. I’m not sure fathers know how important they are in this world—how important they are to their children—and to children whose lives touch theirs who are not even related to them. Children yearn to be close to the significant men in their lives. What their Dads think about life, about the world, about their mothers, about **THEM** are **HUGE** in their minds. And fathers, hear me clearly: children are drawing conclusions about life, about the world, about their mothers and about themselves by observing your life. Don’t think you can “opt out” of being a teacher. Sorry. It’s not an option. If you aren’t writing “good news” with your life, it doesn’t mean you’re producing a blank sheet of paper. It may be you’re writing “bad news”, or “confusing news”. I beseech you to open your heart to God and embrace Christ’s call to write, through your life, the “Gospel of Dad”.

Life circumstances can be difficult. We may think, “My life is just too stressful- it’s too hard, I’m too overwhelmed right now to be paying attention to writing any kind of good news for anybody.” I know we won’t be perfect, and we can’t live the good news without God’s help, but we **CAN** choose rightly, even when caught up in terrible times.

An example of this truth that I cherish is found in the Italian film, “*Life is Beautiful*”. The story takes place in Italy in the period that includes World War II. The main character is a zany man, who falls in love with the woman of his dreams, marries her, and becomes the father of a little boy he dotes on. He and his son play funny and crazy games of imagination.

The war intrudes into the lives of this little family, and the father and son are taken to a concentration camp. Amazingly enough, some of the funniest scenes I’ve ever experienced take place in that concentration camp. The father, determined to protect his son at all costs, invents a fiction about where they are and what they are doing, making it all into a game to win fantastic prizes. In one scene, a brutish German officer enters their barracks, ready to bark out the iron-fisted rules that will govern

their existence in the camp. He asks if anyone in the barracks knows German, who could translate his orders into Italian. The father raises his hand. He is hustled to the side of the officer, where he stands at attention. After each sentence the officer pauses. The father then speaks in Italian, describing the rules of the GAME they are playing, for the ears of his son. He mimics the officer's gestures and inflections. Of course, he knows as much German as the man on the moon, but the officer hasn't a clue. The other prisoners, at first confused, soon catch on and support the father in his determination to protect and love his little boy.

It's a fantastic story and a film I'd recommend, although it is painful and tragic. For me, the movie is a parable that brings alive good news. It's a Gospel movie. The message is clear: no matter what happens to you, to me, we still have the power to choose how we will live and relate to others, even in the midst of war and violence. The father in that movie succeeded: he wrote a Gospel of Dad that would live on in that child, that no one could steal from his heart.

So, here we are gathered together, a bunch of mustard seeds. We are little. We are puny. But God's Spirit is available to us. As we are planted and rooted in God's Spirit, we will change. We are invited to make choices—to make choices that nourish life—to make choices that express love--- to make choices that are good—to make choices that resist evil and oppression—to make choices that change the world. As we do this, we begin to see everything with new eyes. **THE WHOLE WORLD CHANGES**, and so do we. We become something new—no longer little seeds, but bigger plants and sturdy shrubs, in which little ones can find shade and safety. And we write, with our lives, new Gospels: the Gospel of Bob; the Gospel of Anne; the Gospel of Grandma; the Gospel of Grandpa; the Gospel of Dad.

So be it. Amen.