

# OUR "SEEDY" FAITH?

## Sermon, March 18, 2018

### Text: John 12:20-33

You know, the Bible really is a seedy novel, and in these pages we learn that our faith is a seedy faith. I do *not* mean seedy, though, in the sense of being shabby, sleazy, slovenly, squalid, tacky, or unseemly! I mean "seedy" in the positive sense of that word ... life creating, life giving, self-sacrificing, fertile, growing, nourishing. The negative term of "seedy" has an agrarian origin, which philologists trace to the mid-eighteenth century. Vegetables not harvested at the proper time and/or were left to their own devices would eventually "go to seed." When that happened, the vegetable itself passed from the edible stage of growth to the seed-bearing, or yucky, stage and becomes inedible ... droopy, mushy, rotten, soft and just generally unappetizing and unseemly. Think of too ripe tomatoes, smushy pumpkins, rotten apples. Thus "seedy," which once had meant simply "*full of seeds*," began to be used figuratively to mean shabby, sleazy, rotten, unseemly, and the word's usage was expanded to include anything unseemly, shabby, and/or "gone to seed." Once-high class restaurants, once-ritzy sections of town, once-stately motels, once-beautiful lawns ... if uncared for, all these can and often do age, fall apart, and metaphorically "go to seed." However, this seedy novel we call the Bible tells of a seedy faith in the *good* sense of that word, it is full of seeds that bring life and beauty and nourishment and growth and vitality to a needy world ... through selfless sacrifice.

The setting of our Gospel reading takes place just after the triumphal entry of Palm Sunday; this is the lectionary reading for today even though Palm Sunday is next week. We read that some Greeks approach Philip, who is a disciple with a Greek name, and they ask to see Jesus. When Jesus learns these Greeks are looking for him, He responds, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*"

Now up until this point in the Gospel of John, Jesus had repeatedly said that his hour had *not* come. All through John's gospel, like the beating of a drum, we hear (*and usually right from Jesus' lips*) that His hour had not yet come. In John 2:4, when Jesus' mother informed him that they had run out of wine at the wedding in Cana, He told her, "*My hour has not yet come.*" In John 7:6, when his brothers urged him to go to Jerusalem publicly, openly, instead of operating quietly as if in secret in these backwater towns of Galilee, Jesus replied, "*My hour has not yet come.*" Later on in that chapter, after Jesus did slip into Jerusalem discretely, the Jewish authorities tried to arrest Him, but we are told in John 7:30, "*No one laid hands on Him, because His hour had not yet come.*" A little later, Jesus taught in the Temple proclaiming Himself to be the light of the world, and John writes in John 8:20, "*No one arrested Him, because His hour had not yet come.*" But now, in chapter twelve, it seems the clock has struck twelve. We hear from Jesus' own mouth, "*The hour has come.*" Specifically, He says, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*" We can only imagine the buzz of excitement and anticipation from Andrew and Philip. The hour is here! The time is now! Let's go! But then Jesus inexplicably goes on to explain that this long-anticipated "hour" will lead to suffering and death. This One who has left His heavenly home above and sojourned here on earth says He is now facing His hour of death. And He likens His death to that of a seed, a kernel of wheat, whose death produces abundant life.

The Gospel reading is usually appropriate for this time of year, as we usually see signs of new life and new growth all around us; but THIS year we are seeing repeated Nor'easters! Usually about now, though, the trees and flowers start budding, pollen allergies and headaches are kicking in, people are tending to their lawns and are spreading out seed and fertilizer. All around us we are about to see again the countless small miracles of spring's rebirth, and countless thousands, millions of seeds are leaving their "homes" above in the trees and tall plants to sojourn to their eventual deaths, which will in turn bring life to the earth ... these seeds are giving up their lives to produce more life. The natural forces that can bring devastation and destruction ... wind, storm and even fire ... all play a supportive role in the ongoing development of seeding and producing life. Jesus' "seedy" talk may seem strange to our ears at first, but yes, we know something about life ... full, rich and abundant life ... coming through death. It's woven into the warp and woof of creation.

Moody Bible Institute put out a wonderful series of films years ago that was full of then-cutting edge photography and cinematography that drew Scriptural lessons from everyday science in life. Most, if not all, are now available on YouTube; this past week I re-watched Moody Science Video #9 Journey of Life, which was about the miracles inherently exhibited in seeds; two samples from which I'd like to cite:<sup>1</sup> (1) Blowing freely across the open plains, the tumbleweed became something of a symbol of the untamed American frontier. The tumbleweed did not always exist in North America. In the spring of 1886, a handful of Russian immigrants landed in New York harbor. They were farmers by trade. The promise of fertile soil and a land grant drew them to the prairies of South Dakota. With a supply of flax seeds carried from their home land, a crop was planted that would go on to thrive in the Dakotas and Minnesota. By the time of the harvest, however, it was discovered another "immigrant" had

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czMwurMFIKY>

claimed America as its own; however, this one was a stowaway. For intermixed in the bags of imported flax seeds were seeds of another species. Inadvertently, the tumbleweed had also been sown along with the flax, and the rest is history. From its accidental beginnings in South Dakota, the tumbleweed spread throughout the entire western United States and up into Canada. Spherical and lightweight, a mature tumbleweed can hold more than a *quarter of a million* seeds. Only one single root anchors the tumbleweed to the soil. That root will eventually dry, decay and weaken until the *precise* time when its enormous cargo is ripe and ready to travel. The root dies, the tumbleweed itself dies, and a puff of wind comes and off it goes ,, carrying and depositing life wherever it travels, a quarter of a million life-giving seeds are dropped along its tumbling path. This is Life coming through death, as the dried up dead tumbleweed goes wherever the wind leads carrying 250,000 fertile seeds just looking for a place to take root and grow, bringing life to the barrenness. Yes, we know something about life ... full, rich and abundant life ... coming through death. It's woven into the warp and woof of God's creation.

(2) The knob combed pine, which is indigenous to Oregon (*and some parts of northern California*) produces what are known to be the world's hardest and most protective pine cones. Growing in clusters on limbs or directly from the trunk, these oddly shaped cones possess a quality shared by no other pine cones in that they refuse to open and release their seeds from one year to the next. Instead, like little impenetrable fortresses, they remain sealed. They are strong enough to withstand the blows of a hammer, and to resist a forest full of seed-hungry squirrels, birds, and chipmunks which cannot penetrate the armor of the knob combed pine cone. Even time and weather fail to take their toll, as each cone's vise-like grip on the seeds within holds fast, often for decades. In all of nature, only one force is strong enough to open a knob comb pine cone. **Fire.** The searing heat of a forest fire triggers an amazing chain of events. Under the flames the cones begin to crack, but only partially. By opening only partially, and emitting a gaseous vapor, most of the seeds are insulated from the killing flames less than an inch away. Only when the fire has passed will the charred cones open fully. The miracle of a forest's rebirth then takes its course. Protected by the remarkable design of God's creation of the knob combed pinecone, these seeds hold the power to kick-start the restoration of an entire forest devastated by the destruction of fire. Through the destructive fires of adversity comes life, life released through death. Yes, we know something about life ... full, rich and abundant life ... coming through death. It's woven into the warp and woof of creation.

We can imagine the puzzled looks on the faces of Philip and Andrew and those Greeks who had come to see Jesus. They had just heard Jesus proclaim the hour had come for Him to be glorified, but did they understand what they heard? Coming to His time of glory should mean power, not weakness. It should mean exaltation, not humiliation. It should mean the overthrowing of Roman rule in Israel, not submission to it to the point of death. Coming in glory should mean the cries of "Hosanna" would only spread and intensify, not switch very soon to cries of "*Crucify him, Crucify him!*" We now know, from our vantage point of history, that these men and women who loved Jesus would see Him die on a torture instrument the Romans had invented to terrorize their enemies. They would see the Romans take His life, and before that they would see the Romans take His dignity in a public spectacle that was meant to intimidate anybody with thoughts of revolting. The mighty Romans jammed their crosses into the earth like scarecrows, and every one of those crosses proclaimed to the world, "*Caesar is Lord, and don't you ever forget it.*" This is how Jesus will be glorified? Getting glorified on a cross? Where's the glory in that? No, we don't think of finding glory in death, especially when it's the death of our hope, the death of our loved ones, or the death of our dreams. But God can bring life out of death and sacrifice; in fact, it's woven into the warp and woof of creation. Jesus says, "*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*"

Jesus is saying He will die and through His death there will come an abundance of fruit. Jesus' offering of His life is intentional and in accordance with God's intentions, and as if to reiterate that, we read that God affirms this audibly from heaven! This will glorify God! Jesus is that Seed that will bring forth much fruit. Now, we will never fully understand all this on this side of heaven, but we are about to commemorate Holy Week which focuses on this "hour", this glorification of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ which results in abundant (and eternal) life for multitudes. Again, we don't fully understand it, but we know enough to know that His death and eventual resurrection will mean, among many other things, the beginning of a new "crop," a new community of God's people. The members of this community will be known by their selflessness, by their generosity, by their love, by their willingness to sacrifice and by their desire to imitate Christ. They will be known by their offering of themselves to God. They will be known by their willingness to die to their own desires and live to follow God and to do all they can to serve others. In short we, in whom the seed of Jesus' spirit have taken root, are the fruit of Jesus' offering of Himself in this "hour."

As we see in Creation, into seeds God imparts a full measure of His creative power and then sets those seeds free on a journey to carry life throughout the earth to the ends of the earth. Each goes out with the purpose to find a place that will receive and nurture the life it contains. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Word of God is dispersed into the world to every man, woman and child who will receive it, and that Seed has the potential to renew, sustain and bear fruit in any life. May we allow the seed of Jesus Christ to take root in us and grow to produce much fruit, and may we go out to carry His love and creative power and life throughout the earth to the ends of the earth, beginning right where we live.