

Mark 4:1-9 ~ Zechariah 8:12, 16-17

Sowing the Seeds of Peace

20th after Pentecost ~ World Communion ~ Peace & Global Witness Offering ~ October 6, 2024

The Rev. Dr. Laurie Brubaker Davis

Introduction to Second Lesson:

Where does peacemaking begin? Yes, you know the answer. It begins with us. With every interaction and decision, we make. If only we had a “how to be a peacemaker” YouTube video to instruct us, step by step. Well, the snippet I am about to read from the prophet Zechariah written way back about 520 BCE is just that! I will leave it to one of our creative teens to turn this into a TikTok video. Right now, use your imagination to do that. Here is Zechariah’s quick “how to make peace happen” for his people, the remnant of Judah, recently returned home from captivity in Babylon. Broken people, wondering how to start over after that devastation. How to do things better, differently, this time. He casts a vision for peace where each person—old and young, all genders and races, people from north, south, east and west can live without fear and destruction. He calls them out, to respond in kind to the grace that God is extending them after their misdeeds.

Yes, peace is possible. For the most broken, especially. As I read this scripture, let God speak through Zechariah’s words. Try to picture what he is saying. Just imagine if only this one went viral!

Communion Meditation:

Oats, peas, beans and barley grow, Oats, peas, beans and barley grow, Can you or I or anyone know, How oats, peans, beans, and barley grow? [Sung, feebly.] This song is one of the few things I remember from first grade! We sang it as a circle game at my elementary school, Donald A. Quarles in Englewood, New Jersey. Although Raffi popularized it again in the 1970’s, this was actually a folk song that originated in Great Britain back about 1790. As I recall, I loved the song because it was a fun circle game, *and* it suggested that there were things about our world that even grown ups didn’t really know. *Can you or I or anyone know, How oats, peans, beans, and barley grow?* As a 7-year-old, that was mind boggling! (And I am quite sure that the farmers in our congregation and beyond would actually prefer *less* mystery in the seed growing business.)

Perhaps my affection for this song was also an early indication of my love for the mystical. And for the uncanny power of God to do the seemingly impossible. Like growing food for us all from tiny seeds. Or restoring our broken world by becoming one of us. Or giving us this sacrament: a tiny bit of bread, a drop of juice or wine, to fill our body, mind, and spirit and empower us with Christ’s presence and peace. Yes: God doing big things with what we see as small and insignificant, like seeds.

Today, however, we are not talking about oats, peas, beans or barley seeds. On World Communion Sunday we are talking about the seeds of peace. And the call to be Sowers of these seeds. We heard it from Zechariah and from Jesus who were both speaking in the context of

brokenness, vulnerability, and chaos. We know this from the historical context of Zechariah. In our gospel text, it's more subtle, embedded in Mark's brilliant storytelling. The Parable of the Sower is the very first parable that Jesus tells the crowd in Mark's narrative arc. Perhaps the seedbed for all his other parables that follow. If you are a frequent flyer of the Bible or of church, I'm sure you've heard this one before. And maybe hearing it again today, when Ted read it, you started wondering again what kind of soil you really are. I invite you to set that approach to this parable aside for today. Instead, let's listen to how Jesus is calling us all to be Sowers, like Jesus. Sowers of God's peace. Sowers gifted with an unlimited number of these world changing seeds to fling in every direction.

Yes, seed-rich, even in the very midst of violent, chaotic, troubled times, where wars keep raging like Israel's war on Gaza, approaching the grim one-year mark tomorrow, with no ceasefire yet in sight. And where literal storms are getting more frequent and ferocious, most recently Hurricane Helene. Perhaps in the midst of all this, the idea of peace here and now seems fanciful or naïve. Yet, this was also the context in which Jesus first told this parable. Let's look together at how Mark signaled this reality. Take out a pen or pencil and circle the word "sea" or "lake" each time it occurs in the first verse. How many times did you find it? That's right 3 times Mark wrote the same word *thalassan*, or sea in the opening verse! Why is this important? Because "sea" in Mark served not only as a literal locator, but also as a sign for where discipleship is challenged, where boundaries are impassable, and where evil lurks as a formidable foe. Three times in one sentence—he is really pounding this context against the shores of our imaginations.

Again, we see Jesus sitting down, teaching. Beginning with the word in v. 3 Listen! (*Akouete!*) and also (*Idou!*) which means "behold" or look! So, Jesus is telling us: Listen and look! A Sower went out to sow... a story everyone in his audience could relate to. Then what happened? The Sower flings his precious seeds in every direction. And three fourths of them, or 75% of them, fail in one way or another. Farmers can relate to this at the literal level. So too, many of our efforts to bring, to be God's instruments of peace. No matter how often we try our best and it doesn't work, both as individuals and as communities and nations. Note it was the first 75% of the seeds that ultimately failed. And then: the final fling, the final fourth of seed in this story yielded one hundredfold! There's the shocking twist. A really good harvest for a farmer in Jesus' time would have been ten bushels, or ten-fold. A normal return would have been seven and a half fold. So, one hundredfold was absolutely unimaginable. A shocking amount! Disproportionate, out of this world return.

As we consider our current political battles brought daily to us in our mailboxes and on our screens, where it's all about the seeds of failure flung by both sides at the other, I find seeds of hope in the words of Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister who tells us: "If we are to create global community in our time, there must be a voice that can transcend the current politics and national ambitions... But what is that to you and me? Every moment of social tension needs a peacemaker. Otherwise, how can the human family get beyond the competition, domination, annihilation, and blind struggles for power that pass as defense even now? The truth is that only one thing can really bring peace: the commitment that we will not destroy other people's sense

of self, of dignity, of value in the name of truth... Yes, Peace is not an unwillingness to tell a hard truth. ... Peacemaking is your promise to tell truth kindly, clearly, and compassionately. Compassionately. When you live that promise out, then you are truly peacemakers."ⁱ

I want to tell you about some of the seeds of peace we are flinging right around here:

- Our anthem the choir sang, the inspiration of Lisa Carroll: *There is power in peace. When we choose to hold out our hands in love instead of hate, there is power in peace. When children go hungry, no one wins; They pay the price for greed. When land is chosen over innocent children. God's heart bleeds. If we cannot stand together, we will soon be standing alone.*
- The "Compassion Corner" you can visit in our library, a vision of Linda Hitchman and our Outreach Committee. Pick up one of the cards there with the prayer, "Make Me an instrument of Thy Peace" it will fit in your wallet, or smart phone case.
- The community-wide, interfaith concert we are hosting on Nov. 3: "Songs of Peace and Love: For all the People" intended to unite us through the folk songs we sang back in the 60's and 70's.
- Our Peace and Global Witness Offering that flings Seeds of Peace to address systemic change: like working on the project of *Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* that laid the groundwork for the genocide of indigenous peoples around the world; the colonization of Africa, Asia, Australia, the Pacific Islands, and the Americas; and the transatlantic trafficking in persons used as slave labor. And the monumental challenge of seeking solutions to the *root* causes of migration across the world, while offering support for those who have had to flee their homelands.

One more thing about seeds that is important for us to keep in mind: Seeds can take a long time to germinate. Metaphorical seeds can take generations. We plant them for God's kingdom, for the next seven generations and beyond. Whether we get to see their fruit or not is secondary. Our loud and clear and primary call is to fling them, cultivate, and trust God to grow them. Seed flingers, we will end this communion meditation together, with a reading written by Truong Ngoc Phuong.

People are unreasonable, illogical and self-centered. Love them anyway.

If you do good, your coworkers will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

The outstanding performance you achieve today will be forgotten tomorrow. Achieve anyway.

The mistakes you make in experimenting with new ideas will be remembered forever. Make mistakes anyway.

Honesty and compassion make you vulnerable. Be honest and compassionate anyway.

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs. Fight for the underdogs anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you help them. Help them anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and you will get kicked in the teeth.

Give the world the best you have anyway."ⁱⁱⁱ

(Sung to the tune of Oats, Peas, Beans, and Barley Grow):

Peace, joy, love and justice grow, Peace joy, love and justice grow, Let Christ now work through you and me, So Peace, Joy, love and justice grow.

ⁱ Joan Chittister, *The Monastic Heart: 50 Practices for a Contemplative and Fulfilling Life*, (Convergent: New York, NY, 2021) pp.166-167.

ⁱⁱ Truong Ngoc Phuong, "A Reading for Discouraged Advocates," *Peacemaking through Worship Vol. II*, (ed. Jane Parker Huber, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, Louisville, KY: c.1992), p.185.

