

Paw Prints

And

WoolKlippings



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A Monthly Journal of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Fort Dodge, Iowa
and Good Shepherd Episcopal Church, Webster City, Iowa

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God's Kingdom is like a Weed

Jesus also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed. . .yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs." Luke 4

There is such sweet irony in this saying of Jesus, suggesting God's ways are like a majestic tumbleweed, but that is Jesus point, precisely!

Yet, we might have missed Jesus' joke because in church we're supposed to listen to the Bible with very serious piety. Or we might have missed it because we're used to hearing the shrub in this parable mistranslated in other versions of the Bible as a "mustard tree." There is no such thing.

What you and I know as the mustard shrub or plant is the same thing the world over, including Israel: thin and scraggly, two to three feet high, little yellow flowers, popping up all over the place, especially where you don't want it. You know the weed. This, Jesus says, is what the kingdom of God is like.

Jesus was making a parody of a series of passages which run throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, ones that use the mighty cedar of Lebanon as a metaphor.

This tree was so large and strong that its trunk was made into masts for the ships of the Mediterranean and beams for the great temple in Jerusalem. The scriptures say that the righteous – or in other places, the wicked - will tower over others like cedars of Lebanon. The powerful armies of Assyria are like cedars of Lebanon.

For example, the prophet Ezekiel said that Israel would be like the noble cedar: a great and powerful kingdom, in which every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind.

To contrast the kingdom of God with the worldly kingdoms of Israel, Assyria, or Rome, Jesus turned

this familiar metaphor upside down. He said "We all know what the kingdom of Israel is supposed to be like. But to what shall we compare the kingdom of God?...Ah, the mustard shrub! Such a little seed! But when it grows up, it becomes the greatest of all shrubs, putting forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." His audience, people who were close to the earth, must have burst out laughing. What was he trying to say?

Two things, I think. The first is that God appears most powerfully in the least of appearances, not the greatest. The second is that once God takes root in us, his life spreads unpredictably, into places we may not even want it to go.

I've been to the Grand Canyon, floated up the Amazon River, explored the catacombs under Rome and worshipped at St. Paul's, London. I've prayed in sacred monasteries and temples, heard famous musicians and seen Van Gogh's paintings.

But do you know where God has made the most impact upon me? At the kitchen table, on an ordinary Wednesday evening, in a conversation with my family. During "yet another" meeting of a committee I serve on in the diocese. At the bedside of an old man, dying at the heart hospital, with only his daughter by his side. On a walk along the ditchbank with a friend.

Would it be possible that we miss the presence of God because we're looking in the wrong places? Maybe we expect our experience of God to be like the expensive plants we buy at the nursery: vibrant and lush and happy and colorful, full of joy and delight. Surely that's where God is to be found!

But perhaps God is really more available to us in the weedy, forgotten places of our back yard: in the

daily grind of our work, in our suffering, in the lonely and empty times. Perhaps God is most present when we fail, when we know our need for grace.

We may be so busy trying to rid our lives of these things that we don't realize we're weeding out the very presence of God. The last shall be first. Blessed are the meek, the poor in spirit.

And now to the second part of this weedy metaphor. As God's life grows in us, it will take us in some very surprising places, perhaps even where we do not especially want to go.

As we all know, weeds spread unpredictably. Once they get hold in an area, they take on a life of their own. You can't contain them. And once we've invited the Spirit into our lives, into the ministries that we share together, we can't contain grace, either.

Surely some of you started coming to church reluctantly, dragged in by some friend that you couldn't quite say no to, sure that it would be a depressing repeat of bad religious experiences of the past.

But then you heard the Word proclaimed in a new way, saw real community, felt a palpable sense of God's presence in the worship, and before you knew it, you couldn't think of any place you would rather be on Sunday morning.

Or you might ask for God to guide you through a difficult patch, praying only for a little insight and comfort, nothing more, thank you very much. Three months later, you find yourself being hauled through the depths of your brokenness, on your way to being healed of your greatest pain.

It happens all the time. God's life spreads in us like weeds.

Finally, Jesus reminds us that the spreading of the kingdom is not up to us to accomplish. He says that it is like growing grain. After the seed is sown, the farmer rises and sleeps, day after day, for months. The seed sprouts and grows, and the farmer doesn't know – and doesn't have to know – how this happens. Then “the earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.”

After the seed is planted, God's kingdom produces of itself. The original word for this in the text is *automatos*, or “automatically.” Automatically, the seed of God, once planted, produces grain.

Automatically the Spirit begins to do its own work. We don't have to make it happen.

Martin Luther once wrote about this parable, emphasizing his faith in the living power of God's grace. He said “after preaching my sermon, I go home and sip my Wittenburg beer with my friends or take a nap and let the Word do its work.”

What a wonderful way of trusting in God's grace. Put in your effort, offer it in prayer, and then let God go to work. Automatically, the seed of God produces first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain.

But Jesus knew that not everyone is prepared to hear this stuff. It's subversive.

Not everyone welcomes his message that our hope is not to be found in being a part of a powerful, dominant nation, like the great cedar of Lebanon – whether that is ancient Israel or the United States of America. Strive instead, he said, for the things of God that may be smaller but much more important: mercy, understanding, reconciliation, and peace.

Not everyone welcomes his message that God's life can't be controlled within religion like a tidy little English garden. It spreads unpredictably, like weeds in the wild desert, once it takes root.

Not everyone welcomes his message that once we've set our need before God, we can really let go of the reins, go to sleep, and let grace take over.

That's why Jesus spoke in seemingly harmless little stories about mustard seeds and growing grain. These humble parables hide some very subversive stuff. Only those with ears can hear. But Jesus' disciples wanted to hear, and so later he took them aside, and explained everything to them in private. There, he probably asked them, as he asks us today:

Will you keep your eyes open in the midst of it all, appreciating even the scraggly and troublesome weeds of your life, so that you not miss God's presence?

Will you let God's life in you spread like a weed, following it wherever it leads, even if you did not intend for it to take you there?

And after you've asked for God's help and planted the seed of faith, will you please go have a beer with friends or take a nap, and just trust God to get to work? For this, Jesus said, is the kingdom of God.

Love and prayers, Fr. Richard, rector



Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper is back!

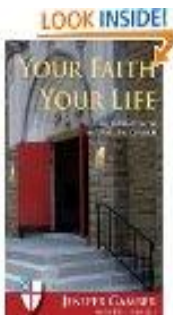
Last year St. Mark's hosted a great pancake feed to mark the beginning of the season of Lent. We had a wonderful crowd to serve, which included a number of Good Shepherd members! Let's do it again. The place is Taylor Hall, the date is February 16th, and the serving hours are from 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm. The menu includes a choice of plain or blueberry pancakes, sausage, fruit, orange juice, milk, and coffee. **A donation basket to benefit the people of Haiti will be available to those wishing to make a contribution.** Those wishing to make monetary or in-kind contributions to the supper are asked to please note on your check "Shrove Tuesday" or drop your food item off at church. This year, the men of St. Mark's are assuming the primary cooking role and our youth group plan to once again serve as the wait staff.

The day immediately preceding Ash Wednesday, the onset of Lent in the Christian churches of the West, is known in English as Shrove Tuesday. It occurs between 2 February and 9 March, depending on the date of Easter. The day takes its name from "shriving"—the pre-Lenten confession and absolution of the faithful as a preparation for Lent that was common in the European Middle Ages. Feasting on foods initially prohibited during Lent, such as meat, eggs, and milk products, was integral to Shrove Tuesday observance.

Come to Feast before we all Fast! Free Marti Gras beads will be distributed.



February 17, 2010
The Liturgy of Ash Wednesday
Imposition of Ashes
Noon and 6:00 p.m. ~ St. Mark's
7:30 p.m. ~ Good Shepherd



2010 Lenten Program

If you want to know more about what it means to be an Episcopalian, this program is for you! Our Lenten study will explore some of the rich dimensions of our faith heritage as Episcopalians. The text for the study is the newly published, "Your Faith, Your Life: An Invitation to the Episcopal Church," by Jenifer Gamber and Bill Lewellis. If you wish to purchase a copy of the text, you can do so directly via Amazon.com, which offers both new and used copies ranging in price from \$8 to \$10. If you would like the church to place your order, please let the office know by Wednesday, February 10th.

This study is being offered at both St. Mark's and Good Shepherd. The dates and times are:

Wednesdays at St. Mark's: Feb. 24, March 3, 10, 17, and 24. 6:00 pm Taize Eucharist followed by simple meal and study.

Thursdays at Good Shepherd: Feb. 25, March 4, 11, 18, April 25. 6:00 pm Worship followed by simple meal and study.

LESSONS FOR FEBRUARY

February 7 – 5 Epiphany

1st Lesson – Isaiah 6:1-8
Psalm – 138
2nd Lesson – 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Gospel – Luke 5:1-11

February 14 – Last Epiphany

1st Lesson – Exodus 34:29-35
Psalm – 99
2nd Lesson – 2 Corinthians 3:12 – 4:2
Gospel – Luke 9:28-36

February 17 – Ash Wednesday

1st Lesson – Joel 2:1-2, 12-17
Psalm – 103:8-14
2nd Lesson – 2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10
Gospel – Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

February 21 – Lent 1

1st Lesson – Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Psalm – 91:1-2, 9-16
2nd Lesson – Romans 10:8b-13
Gospel – Luke 4:1-13

February 28 – Lent 1

1st Lesson – Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18
Psalm – 27
2nd Lesson – Philippians 3:17-4:1
Gospel – Luke 13:31-35

Paw Prints for St. Mark's



It's Annual Meeting Time Again!

Our Annual Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, February 14, 2010, immediately following our 9:00 am service. Among the actions to be taken will be the election of two new members of the Vestry, the adoption of a 2009 operating budget, and the election of lay delegates and alternates to Diocesan Convention. We will also take a moment to thank our retiring Vestry members, Elaine Weidlein and Keith Scherff, for their service to the parish. This meeting will follow our new shortened worship service format in order to provide ample time for our meeting. We will share a meal together. Menu: Ham & Potato Casserole. Please bring a salad or dessert.



For a second straight year, St. Mark's participated in the Fort Dodge Interfaith Forum Ecumenical Sunday Pulpit Exchange and Pew Rotation, after fulfilling a wonderful partnership with Grace Lutheran Church in 2009. The Reverend Paul Stone, pastor of the Fort Dodge and Rockwell City Prison Congregations, was the preacher and celebrant at St. Mark's on January 24th and received a very warm reception by the people of St. Mark's. The following Wednesday evening, January 27th, Fr. Richard was invited to preach at the prison worship service accompanied by the following group of St. Mark's parishioners: Aaron Hudson, Jane Martin, Holly Scherff, and Esther Merrill. As the year progresses, St. Mark's is planning additional trips to the prison on Wednesday evenings to take part in the rich worship and fellowship of this caring Christian community.

"WOOLKLIPPINGS" FROM GOOD SHEPHERD

In response to the plight of the Haitian Shepherd has given \$500 to the Episcopal members also contributed to the



people, St. Margaret's Guild of Good Relief and Development Fund. Individual earthquake relief effort.



Good Shepherd's annual meeting was held on January 31st. A wonderful soup potluck meal was enjoyed before the meeting convened in the church, with soup being provided by Michelle Haberman, Joan Haberman, and Lynn and Barbara Flowerday. Outgoing members of the Bishop's Committee, Lynn Flowerday and Robbie Katschke, received praise for their faithful service and Michelle Haberman and Nan Bucknam were each elected to serve three year terms on the Board. The congregation also adopted an operating budget for 2010 and discussed lawn care, future fellowship events, lay distribution of communion, and a benefit for Mark Whaley.

Requiescat in pace

Marcella (Marci) Dodge, a long-time member of Good Shepherd and resident of Webster City, died on Wednesday, January 21st, at the age of 81. Marcella Florence Rohner, daughter of Frank and Irene Miller Rohner, was born September 27, 1928 at Garnavillo, Iowa. She attended the University of Northern Iowa and moved to Webster City in 1952. On December 17, 1955, she married Henry Richard (Dick) Dodge at LuVerne, MN. The couple resided in Webster City, where she taught in the Webster City school system for 24 years, retiring in 1994. Mr. Dodge died January 4, 2005. She had been a resident of Southfield Wellness Community since May of 2003. The Burial Office was said for Marci at a 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, January 30th, at Good Shepherd, attended by her loving family, her church family, and her many friends.

FUTURE NOW

Webster City Transformation Council

On Sunday, January 31st, the newly composed Webster City Transformation Council (WCTC) launched a community-wide dialogue program with a performance of "American Dreamer", a one man play by noted Iowa actor, Tom Milligan, based on the life of Henry A. Wallace. In the weeks to follow, members of the community, both adult and young people, are engaging in dialogue about the future of Webster City. These "respectful and civil discussions" are designed to lead to a vision for the community and strategies for bringing positive change. This program is one of many initiatives now being implemented in Webster City and the surrounding region to respond to the announcement last fall of the eventual closure of the Electrolux plant in early 2011.



Adam Martin-Schwarze and Lynn Flowerday are members of the cast of the upcoming Webster City Community Theater production of "Everybody Loves Opal," which opens in mid-February.. The January edition of Webster City Living boasts a great picture of Adam and fellow actor Dale Arends on the cover.

A Litany for Haiti

The world's gaze is on Haiti as its people continue to work towards recovery from the Jan. 12 earthquake that crippled much of the nation's infrastructure and killed and injured tens of thousands of its people. The Episcopal Church, through the Diocese of Haiti and Episcopal Relief & Development, is committed to immediate relief and long-term reconstruction, and asks the prayers and support of all Episcopalians for its mission there.

God of infinite mercy, who calls forth order out of chaos, peace out of turmoil, calm out of fear, we come before you aching and tender, crying out for Haiti and her people, saying, We lift our prayers to you, O God: You are the hope of all Creation.

We pray for Haiti, land of mountains and sea, where the very earth has shifted. May her tremors cease. May her tumult end. We pray for her people, shattered yet courageous, frightened yet bold, destitute and longing for relief. May their voice be heard. May their need be met. We lift our prayers to you, O God.

You are the hope of all Creation.

We pray for the injured, broken and lost: thirsting for clean water, hungry for food, stripped of shelter, desperate for medical care; they look to the world for hope. May their dry mouths find drink, their empty bellies find food, their families find cover, and their bodies find health. We lift our prayers to you, O God.

You are the hope of all Creation.

We pray for rescuers, those who do the work of recovery, laboring in the midst of agony; for healers, doctors, nurses, and all who tend those wounded in body, mind, or spirit. May their hands be steady. may their resolve be sure. May their work be filled with grace. We lift our prayers to you, O God.

You are the hope of all Creation.

We pray for the dying and those who have died, whose frail bodies now line the city streets. May mercy be abundant. May death have dignity. May they never be forgotten. We lift our prayers to you, O God.

You are the hope of all Creation.

We pray for the global community, grieving and responding in love. May our action be swift. May our purpose be certain. May our devotion endure. We lift our prayers to you, O God.

You are the hope of all Creation.

We pray for the days to come, the future, and the promise of what lies ahead. May new roads be paved; new industry be born; new fortunes rise; and new friendships sustained. We lift our prayers to you, O God.

You are the hope of all Creation.

God of compassion, now let us answer your call and respond to our sister Haiti through steadfast commitment, diligence in prayer, charity in action, and constancy in hope. Her needs are deep and ours is a land of plenty. With open hand and open heart may our prayers be known in the eager generosity of our giving. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

Abiding God, your light is ever present with us, piercing through the darkness of tragedy. We give you thanks for the bright beacon of hope found when your people join together for the welfare of all. And now, when all seems dark, illuminate for the world your vision of hope, dignity, and life abundant set forth for Haiti from the beginning of creation. In your light all shall be revealed and all shall be made whole. Amen.

Litany by Wendy Tobias, Carol Wade and Alexandra Zepeda, from Strength Through Unity: A Service of Prayer for Haiti on Jan. 17 at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. For a video of the service and the homily by Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, visit <http://www.nationalcathedral.org/>.

Housekeeping Duties for February 2010

ST. MARK'S

	February 7th	February 14th	February 21st	February 28th
Acolyte 9:00 a.m.	Callan Anderson	Brody O'Tool	Lydia Brown	Kaelly Scherff
LR/CB 9:00 a.m.	Mary Beth Rice	Georgiana Meadows	John Daniel	Holly Scherff
Altar Guild				
Coffee Servers	Holly & Keith Scherff	Tom & Candice Martin	Sharon & Don Vogel	Deb O'Tool
Altar Flowers	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN
Sanctuary Candle	OPEN	Joyce & Gary Anderson	OPEN	OPEN
Funeral Committee	Sharon Vogel, Chairman, Susan Derscheid, Esther Merrill, Volunteer			

GOOD SHEPHERD

	February 7th	February 14th	February 21st	February 28th
Acolyte 10:45 a.m.	Joel Haberman	Zac Katschke	Antrez Conley	Jake Haberman
LR/CB 10:45 a.m.	Lynn Flowerday	Robbie Katschke	Deb Leksell	Judy McLaughlin
Lector 10:45am	Tom McLaughlin	Angie Martin-Schwarze	Steve Haberman	Nan Bucknam
Altar Guild	Deb Leksell			
Coffee Servers	Kelly Ubben			
Greeters	Michelle Haberman	Gus Derman	Joan Haberman	Lynn Flowerday

Happy Birthday

2nd Hunter Hesler	4th Brody O'Tool	5th Bud Rice	8th Adam Dodge	9th Mike Haberman
10th Michelle Haberman	14th Elta Brown	17th Jasmine Hesler	17th Saiveon McCaleb	18th Corinne Elrod
18th Molly Hoveland	18th Samantha Leksell	20th Nan Bucknam	20th Tyrese McCaleb	24th Katie Haberman
24th Sophia Vanderpool	26th Rosemary Boge			