

At the Working Preacher conference I attended a few weeks ago presenter David Lose asked this question of the group, "How many of you install your church council members by having them come forward during worship and having a little installation service?" Almost everyone raised their hands. He went on, "How many of you install your Sunday School teachers at the beginning of the year by having them come forward during worship?" Not as many raised their hands. We don't so I didn't and I started feeling a bit guilty. Then he went on, "How many of you in March had all the accountants in your congregation come forward and be upheld as they go into the busiest time of the year preparing people's taxes?" No hands went up. "And on Labor Day how many of you recognize all the factory workers and laborers in your congregation by having them come forward?" Again, no hands.

He went on to explain this big deficiency in the church, and it exposes a subtle arrogance too. Why do we think that serving on church council is somehow more Godly than a CPA helping people with their taxes? Why do we overlook the work of

the school janitor as if it is somehow less important to the kingdom of God than church work?

One of the founding principles of the Lutheran movement was the idea of the priesthood of all believers. It is the idea that all people are called by God to serve in the kingdom of God. And, people do that in all walks of life. I believe Luther said that if you make shoes you should make them to the glory of God.

Right along with this is the thoughts that the word "evangelism" conjures in most people's minds. Few Christians are comfortable when the word evangelism is spoken. They get nervous. Most people envision some nutcase standing on the street corner with a megaphone in hand shouting at everyone. Or maybe getting trapped in an airplane beside someone who's decided it is her mission to "save" you. You think, "Don't make me do that. If I have to act like that to get to heaven then I don't like this Christianity stuff much at all."

I think our gospel reading sheds light on these issues. Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter

seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.”

I think we need to see everything we do every day of the week as scattering the seed of the kingdom of God. And I think we should do more than just hear that from the pulpit. I think, as David Lose suggests, that as a community of faith that is something we should recognize more fully. Perhaps even make a list of the vocations the members of the congregation hold, and then be sure to regularly recognize and celebrate each.

Remember, a vocation is not the same as an occupation. A dictionary will define an occupation as the principle work or business a person engages in to make a living. A vocation is defined as a strong impulse or inclination to follow an activity. Vocations and occupations can be the same. You are very blessed if they are. But many vocations are unpaid - child rearing, marriage, community involvement. Just because you retire doesn't mean your vocation has stopped, at least I hope not!

And before we leave the connection between vocation and occupation, if you go to work every day and what you do feels like it is a calling from God, great! If not, I'd suggest looking for a job that does feel like what you are called to do. But ultimately your occupation may be something you do in service to your vocation. If your chief vocation is to provide for your family and the occupation you'd like to have would not provide the finances or health insurance you need for your family, then maybe you have to stay put.

Even this simple thought, which many people have had, speaks to the sense of God's call that goes with a vocation. A person feels called by God to do something, like support a family, and the only way to do it is to endure hard and unfulfilling work.

You are scattering seeds every day with everything you do. Sometimes you may be acting deliberately. Sometimes you may not, but it is all scattering seed. Other people see and experience you in every moment. It conveys a lot about you, and as an ambassador for God's kingdom, it also conveys a lot about God.

You never know what seeds will fall on bad soil and never sprout. Yet other seeds you never knew you planted may fall in deep rich soil that will grow and flourish.

As Jesus' parable suggests - you don't know. And you can't predict it. He says, "The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head." Your job is the scattering. The growing may happen on its own. The slightest gesture from you on a perfectly ordinary day may change the course of someone else's life.

The story *Les Miserables* is a fictional story, but I believe the spirit of much of it is true. While the book is more detailed than the musical, even the musical notes the root of Jean Valjean's goodness. Jean Valjean was an escaped convict who took up lodging with a bishop one night. In the morning Jean Valjean leaves early repaying the bishop's kindness by stealing his valuable silver candlesticks. The police catch up with him, recognize the candlesticks and return him to the bishop. Instead of being angry the bishop says let him go, I gave him these candlesticks. What is more he left too early to

take what more I had to give him. And the bishop gives him a silver cup.

I'm not suggesting that is a way to solve crime. It won't work! But if you know the story you know Jean Valjean embraces his vocation every other day of his life. He becomes a political leader, he provides jobs to people, transforms evil people, saves helpless women.

Perhaps another fictional account that you know, but also one that bears much truth is the movie *It's A Wonderful Life*. In the ordinary course of day to day drudgery in a dead end job that barely pays the bills George Bailey transforms an entire town. Only when he gets the gift of seeing what they world would be like without him -and he considers his efforts worthless- does he realize how much he has done.

Our gospel concludes with the parable of the mustard seed. Jesus says, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the

greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

Jesus is using exaggeration here, typical of parables, for a mustard seed is not the smallest seed and the mustard shrub is not the largest shrub. Yet the point is clear. An insignificant thing gives life to not only itself but provides in many ways for others too.

We should do better as a congregation celebrating our vocations. God is at work in us so that our work is seed for others as well. Ultimately what we do every day will build up the kingdom of God, whether we know we are doing it or not.

Amen