

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish  
Newark, DE  
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – July 30, 2017/Year A  
Genesis 29:15-28; Psalm 105:11-11, 45b; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52  
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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*May my words reveal the greater glory of God!*

AMEN

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**In 1492, Columbus sailed the oceans blue. In 1842, St. Thomas's opened in faith new, too ... in Newark!** I suspect Devon Miller Duggan might have a word or two to say about my poetic prowess, or lack thereof. I guess will take off **the next great American poet** off my post-ministry bucket list. Yet my somewhat poetic attempt is to point us toward the **beginnings of St. Thomas's on August 1, 1842.** On Tuesday, we celebrate **175 years in the seed planting business.**

We were founded by a vision of a few men, with mustard seed faith, to bring an Anglican/Episcopal worshiping community to Newark and then small Newark College student body. In the words of the article about St. Thomas's written in the **Delaware History** pamphlet in 2010, St. Thomas's was formed on the need to bring **"a true religious experience to Newark."** The article notes at the time there were two Presbyterian churches along Main Street, while the "rowdy" Methodists were put off onto a side street. The community wanted to provide religious experiences that offered **"reasonable and refined expressions of faith."** Our liturgical practices fit the bill, and the property at the point of Main Street and Delaware Avenue was purchased to build our church.

175 years later, and here we still are bearing the "mustard seeds" of faith, seeking to live into and out of God's grace and love in this new/old home of St. Thomas's. The call to our living faith is as powerful now as it was August 1, 1842 when we incorporated. To paraphrase a favorite theologian Dr. Seuss, **"Oh, the places we have been ... Oh, the places we will go and grow, together!"**

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As I experience the truth of God's economy, the continuing teaching discourse of Jesus and today's round of parables invite me, and I hope all, to look at our 175 years with renewed eyes to see and ears to hear. Might we engage our heart and mind with the possibilities of seeing the **hidden and growing power** of this community of faith, this people gathered now, like those **seeds in good soil, the miniscule mustard seed** that blossoms into large and fruitful trees, and the **unseen leaven** in flour that brings life and abundance to all. The Reverend Barbara Brown Taylor reflects on the kingdom parables in this way ...

**“It may be that God has resorted to the oldest trick in the book. For God has hidden the kingdom not in some exotic place that no one would ever think to look, but has placed it in PLAIN VIEW. That is, in the ordinary circumstances of our everyday lives, there is holiness hidden even in the dullest of our days. So if we are to speak of that which is beyond all words, we must begin with words we know, in places and with things we know. For earth is where the seeds of heaven are sown.”**

*“The kingdom of heaven is like ...”* The parables of Jesus convey **cosmic truths through concrete stories**. They point **beyond themselves** to what is often a deeper invitation to be God’s kingdom builders **on earth as in heaven like this**.

I was raised on my father’s family farm in the 50’s and 60’s. It was a wonderful life, surrounded by the hard work to maintain and care for the crops we planted and produced. I am reminded that my Grandfather always wanted over one-half of our annual planting to be **soybeans**. Now we were a supplier to a large Campbell Soup plant in Camden, New Jersey, and there did not seem to be a large demand for **soybean soup!** The wisdom of my Grandfather rings clear to this day, for the soy plant enriched the soil for the following years planting of other crops. He also had a buyer of our soy crop who was on the leading edge of producing many of the soy products we now take for granted. **Hidden and growing power** in this inconsequential and inexpensive soy bean product.

In Jesus’ time, financial institutions were not in vogue as yet, so valuables and money were often hidden in one’s home, and more likely buried on the property. Wills and legal trusts were not as prevalent either, so if the one hiding their treasure failed to tell others **WHERE** the treasure was hidden before dying, that treasure awaited the discovery of another. Just think of the treasures of our world history unearthed every day in archaeological digs. So when Jesus says, *“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field ...”* there would be knowing nods by those gathered around him. Continuing with the pearl of great value, this would resonate with the increased multicultural trading and growing marketplaces in the Middle Eastern crossroads we know as Israel and Palestine this day.

In the rabbinic tradition, leaven was associated with fermentation and decay to symbolize corruption in the world. In contrast, the message of this parable is that *just as a tiny lump of yeast can enlarge a bowl of dough, so will the preaching and healing ministry of Jesus germinate a dynamic new reality with results far out of proportion to its present size*. Three measures of flour would weigh fifty pounds and provide bread for up to a hundred people, illustrating the extravagant abundance of God.

Life is an ungainly mass of dough on its way to becoming abundant bread. Just as yeast permeates the entire lump, so the kingdom is present everywhere. Everywhere it becomes manifest for those with eyes to see.

If we look around us and within us, we can recognize the presence of the kingdom. The kingdom is at work, just as yeast is active in the dough. As yeast is invisible and known by its effects, so the kingdom is hidden, concealed, buried deep in ordinary circumstances, yet known by its effects. Look at your life in the light of grace for something is there for you to find. That something is the activity of the kingdom bubbling away in you. When you find the kingdom among the realities of your life, nothing prevents you from finding this same kingdom present in the circumstances that surround you, in the lives of other people, everywhere you choose to look.

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**In 1842, St. Thomas's opened in faith new, too ... in Newark!** This week I sat in the churchyard for a while, the cemetery behind the first St. Thomas's at the point of Main Street and Delaware Avenue. I sat in that small sacred space, the hum of traffic passing by, to be with those saints of our 175 years, and those I have known and served my short nine years with you. We know and remember some of them – **Estelle Smith, Bill Redd, Claudia Pistek, Pat Strahorn, Bill and Marjorie Lotter, Virginia Rickolt, Eloise and Frank Nelson.** There are many others you bear in your heart memory who now call us to LIVE this mustard seed faith into this 21<sup>st</sup> century world, different yet not.

Our Episcopal tradition of the Jesus Movement still offers rich, dignified liturgies and music to raise the soul to the “high gates of heaven.” Yet we are not the **church of our nation** as we were in earlier times. People do not come because they know **who we are and where we are** – just ask most people around town where St. Thomas's is located, and hang on for the plethora of locations we are BELIEVED to be located.

So we are called, on this 175<sup>th</sup> Founding Day remembrance, to BE the seeds of faith into your world each and every day, now. To BE the St. Thomas's **GPS** that invites and guides others into our parish community of faith and service, now. To BE the authors of the next pages of this faith story, page 176 and onward, now. To BE believers and bearers of THIS Jesus Movement into our world, right here and right now.

To paraphrase a favorite theologian Dr. Seuss, “**Oh, the places we have been ... Oh, the places we will go and grow, together!**”

***AMEN***