

June 21, 2015      Summer Worship in the Chapel

Mark 4: 26-33      It's Not What We Expect

We've all had situations in our lives when we were certain about the direction things were going. There have been times when we have been so clear about the outcome that we expected, that we thought of nothing else or looked for nothing different. And then life intervened. The unexpected happened.

With my recent hip surgery the emphasis was always on the rehab. The operation was routine, a done deal, but the rehab would make all the difference. So I was going to be the best rehabber ever. But let me tell you, it sure wasn't what I expected. I assume rehab meant work, like working out at the gym several times a day work. I thought rehab was some sort of boot camp. So I got off on the wrong foot right away. There I was power walking with my walker in the hospital the very next day. I was showing off to anyone I could get to watch. Well in the middle of the night this power walker's leg swelled up like a balloon, and totally freaked me out. And yet, I still didn't get it. I got out of the hospital a day early so became way more active right away but soon discovered literally it was two steps forward and immediately one step back. Then I would lie low and get behind in the recovery process. I was racing ahead and lagging behind. I was all over the map physically and emotionally. Slowly I learned that rehab meant lots of rest and leg elevation and icing between modest activities.

The words of Mark Twain first delivered to me by Philip Johnston, rang in my ears. ***"It's not what you don't know that trips you up. It's what you know, you know for sure that just ain't so that gets you every time."***

In our scriptures today, we have vivid examples of how Rehab or renewal works in **God's New Day**. And sure enough, it is not what we think, just not what we expected.

In our Gospel lesson, **Jesus** uses the growth phenomenon to tease out images of **God's New Day**. **Jesus** talks about a farmer who sows seed, then goes about his business day and night. He keeps his eyes on things and at the right time, recognizes that the harvest is at hand and sets to work. The soil and the sun and the rain each do their part, and the crop flourishes on its own inner timetable. That is what I discovered with my rehab. My body was healing according to its own schedule. If I over did it. If I got ahead of things there was a short term setback. If during a setback I over compensated, then, I fell behind. Eventually each morning as I got up I could feel an improvement, the healing was working all on its own.

**God's New Day** grows differently than our busy human activities or over functioning agendas. **Jesus** is suggesting that the **Kingdom of God** has its own way of working out. It is not what we expect.

**God's New Day** is growing around us. It has its own power and energy and inspiring **Spirit**. It is built into the very fabric of the universe. It is a spiritual reality. It is as real as the healing power in our own bodies. It's as real as the growing soil in our fields and gardens. When the harvest time comes in a situation or a circumstance, the grace of **God** is just hanging in the trees like fruit ready to be picked. **God** gives the increase. **God** gives the grace. We are called to reap the benefits! Where else do you get a deal like that? Well, I discovered that when we get in sync with rehab and the healing energy of the body, we reap something similar.

However, **Jesus** isn't satisfied with this initial insight, so he takes the growth imagery a step further. In fact, a giant leap further and the gospel writers just can't keep up. The image of the mustard seed goes so far beyond what they think, what *'they know they know for sure'*, that each evangelist recounts the parable differently and interprets it differently. This tells us that these writers were not people of the land. They can't get their heads around the two images that **Jesus** employs together, mustard seeds and cedars of Lebanon, let alone the attitude that must have connected them.

Mustard was recognized as a noxious weed that according to the Law of Moses was not to be planted in gardens with other vegetables and crops. We all know that a noxious weed takes over a garden. Poison ivy can be a ground plant, a creeping vine or a bush. I know because all three types grew on my farm in southern Ontario. But mustard only takes the form of a flimsy, ground cover plant. So the reference to a shrub or huge bush is simply erroneous. Forget Matthew's image of a majestic cedar of Lebanon.

With the advantage of comparative study, we can recognize and reduce the editorial additions of the time and see the parable in a clearer light. With all the distortions removed it is not what we expect. To cut to the chase, **Jesus** is most likely making a satirical statement and a rhetorical remark.

I can image him saying, **"Now what noxious, weedy, overgrowth, example can I use for God's New Day? I know. It is like planting that pesky little mustard seed that grows up and takes over the whole garden... What did you expect a cedar of Lebanon where birds of the air make nests in its shade?"**

**God's New Day** grows differently than the usual Old Testament expectations.  
**God's New Day** does not share the majesty of biblical proportions.  
But **God's New Day** is designed to take over our safe and predictable lives.  
**God's New Day** has its own inherent takeover ways. It's up to us to get with the program, to get in sync with **God's healing and rehabbing** ways.  
**God's New Day** is growing around us and the harvest is waiting.

*Application for This Summer:*

Don't look for the great '**Cedars of Lebanon where birds of the air make nests in their shade.**'

Rather, listen for the urging of the **Spirit** that will take over your life and call you into **abundant living. It's the best kind of rehab going.**

**Amen.**