

May the words of my mouth...

OK, I readily admit that at times I do struggle with some of Jesus' parables.

The last two Sundays, after Jesus told parables about a sower of seeds, his disciples asked Jesus to explain them, and he readily did so.

This morning we heard Jesus telling his followers five short parables about the "Kingdom of Heaven"

But after he finished, Jesus asked his disciples, "Have you understood all of these things?" And they nodded their heads and told him, "Yes."

I don't know about you, but when I heard today's parables, I felt more inclined to shake my head and answer, "Nope."

Parables can't be taken verbatim... they're more of an analogy.

And especially since we don't live in first century Palestine, we can often find ourselves at a disadvantage, being unfamiliar with how living and actually surviving worked back then

Not living 2000 years ago, placing Jesus' parables into any context that translates for us today can be a bit challenging at times.

We simply don't have huge mustard trees here in the Americas.

They are native only to the Middle East and Africa. It's hard to imagine how they might have impacted life in Palestine.

And I don't think there are too many "treasures" lying hidden in farm fields here in the Skagit Valley to just be stumbled across, waiting for us to just dig them up.

And so, I'm going to share another story...

At our old house, out in the woods down in Woodinville, we had a massive shrub known as a Burning Bush. It was just a few feet outside our dining room window where we could look at it every morning and evening.

Eight foot high and a dozen feet across.

Throughout the winter months its branches were bare, but each Spring its limbs soon filled out with thousands of small green leaves, and our smaller bird friends built their nests and laid their eggs deep within them.

And as summer waned, the bush's little leaves turned a glorious blazing crimson. Thousands of tiny red berries appeared. Each berry has just one or two tiny seeds.

And just like clockwork, scores of birds, many species we had never seen before, all descended upon that bush to gorge themselves on those berries.

For only a couple days we would watch them picking it clean while other birds hopped around on the ground beneath the bush, cleaning up anything that fell unclaimed during those feeding frenzies.

And of course – as with everything that goes into a bird – it must eventually come out again – indiscriminately. Think about the windshields and hoods of our cars!

Burning Bushed seeds germinate and take root anywhere God decides.

Most seedlings end up getting plucked up as weeds – or eaten before they can grow into juvenile bushes.

But a few do manage to survive and grow.

Kind of like church congregations.

God's children come together, first in small groups, to share their stories of faith. And sometimes those groups take root and flourish. Others simply sprout, struggle to survive, and then wither.

Some do grow for several years but run out of energy. Others start out well but fail to feed themselves or to remain relevant.

But others do grow and thrive, drawing hundreds of people and their families to worship together. To share their faith journeys and love of God, our Creator; of Jesus, our Redeemer; and of the Holy Spirit who nurtures and feeds us all.

God's church communities find within themselves a call to reach out to other people who are seeking meaning and purpose in their lives. Seeking a love of Jesus and all that he did for us in his short time here on earth with us.

New members come – and old members move away to be closer family, or to move into care facilities.

Each person who comes to Saint Paul's brings along with them spiritual gifts and stories to share.

And those who do decide to leave – share their gifts with new congregations.

Not all of our gifts are shared here within these walls at St. Paul's.

Many are shared on the streets, at rallies protesting inhumane treatment of women, of children, of people who don't look or sound like us.

Many are shared by volunteering in food banks or in hospitals.

Taking time from our days to just pause and talk with strangers who appear to be struggling with their loads.

But all it takes is for just one seed to sprout and take root.

All it takes is the right seed... carried by the right bird... to the right place... to be dropped and to take root.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like the magnificent Burning Bush that gives food to the hungry, rest to the weary, and shelter from the storm.

But truthfully, it's not about those seeds of the mustard tree itself, or the Burning Bush, or blackberry canes...

Those seeds are important as they represent the stories of God working in our lives, and the good news brought to us by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But just like the seeds, they don't spread themselves.

They need help.

That'd where the birds come in.

They're the ones who spread the seeds.

And that's where we come in.

We are the "birds" in this parable.

We are the birds of many colors and voices, each of us called to spread the seeds of the Kingdom of Heaven.