

Message: Planting Seeds of Faith**“God plants seeds of faith”**

“Pastor Pio Tica from the Philippines and his family visited the headquarters of The Gideons International recently. That visit by the pastor and his wife, along with his son’s family, provided a powerful illustration of the impact that just one seed of faith can make. The seed was one man giving another a copy of God’s Word.

Pio’s father, Eriberto Tica, received a Scripture from The Gideons International a couple of decades ago in the Philippines. That small seed, once planted, grew. That Scripture led to Eriberto receiving Jesus as his Lord and Savior. But God wasn’t done. In the wonderful, unseen way God works, the seed blossomed and branched out. It ultimately produced a multi-generational legacy of pastoring, preaching, and church planting by the Tica family.

Pio wishes his father, Eriberto, could see the fruit planted for the Kingdom of God through that single Scripture. Pio, and his three brothers became pastors. All fifteen of Eriberto’s grandsons have become pastors, as well as two nephews. To date, more than 600 churches have been planted by members of the Tica family. Pio thanks the Gideon ministry for sharing God’s Word in the Philippines, saying, “The Gideons International has been a true blessing to God’s work around the world.””¹

What an amazing testimony about the impact of planting a seed of faith! The man who gave that Scripture to Eriberto Tica could never imagine the impact it would have. All he knew is that he was called to serve God and to extend an invitation. His job was to extend the invitation. God did the rest, the mysterious process of sprouting, growing and bearing spiritual fruit. This is a great illustration of the parables Jesus told from our passage for today from Mark 4:26-34.

Like that unknown, unseen man, we are called to serve God in the same way. In Matthew 9:37-38, Jesus said to the disciples, “*the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest*” (NRSV). My prayer for us

¹ Source: Reuel Tica, *The Gideons International*

and for everyone in our community is for God to wake us from our spiritual slumber. We sleep like Sleeping Beauty in the castle, waiting for a true love to awaken us, while a wall of thorns grows up around us.

Jesus’ love is true. When we experience it, really and truly, we can’t sleep any longer. Our spirit is startled and awakened. It begins seeking God. Our spirit comes from God and God calls it back. That’s why we’re driven by questions about God and God’s kingdom. God’s kingdom is heaven and we will either experience it’s joy or it’s absence after we die. Mark 4:29 reminds us the harvest will come. We all will die. And we will experience Christ’s second coming. On that day, the harvest will be complete. Christ will come as King to judge the living and the dead. And those who are faithful will see and know the results from their labor.

There’s good news: God’s kingdom is present today, too. Before he called his first disciple, Jesus sent a clear message of hope: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news”* (Mark 1:15). Jesus came to Earth, God made human, to save us from sin and death. Jesus is the bridge between the eternal Kingdom of God and the temporary life we experience in the world as we know it.

Humans are easily distracted. We are uniquely made and uniquely gifted. Unfortunately, in our giftedness, we often lose our way. Rather than seeking God, we seek our gratification and selfish ambition. And, by doing so, we lose access to God’s kingdom.

One sign we are losing touch with God is when our spiritual senses become dull. When we separate ourselves from God by what we say and do, in our attitudes and actions, we no longer see, hear or experience God’s grace in our life. We aren’t looking for it. God’s voice is still and quiet. It is not a raging fire, earthquake or hurricane. If we don’t make time to be before God in the stillness and silence of prayer, listening for God’s voice, we are starving our spirit. After a time of starving, it atrophies and withers away. Most likely, you will find yourself saying “no” to God, rather than finding a way to say “yes” to the prompting of the Spirit.

The effect of our spiritual deafness and blindness isn’t limited to our personal lives. Spiritual deadness affects the ministries of the church. When ministries are not led by the Spirit, they are led through the whim and will of people. That’s a recipe for failure. Even if the group’s intent is good, a ministry will fail if the members do not embrace God’s Spirit first in their attitude, words and actions. We must show our faith and love for God in what we do. That’s the way to have a true, authentic faith. And God blesses that kind of faith – he certainly did through the Tica family, among others.

Mark records two of Jesus’ parables about the kingdom of God in Mark 4:26-34. Parables are stories that have factual elements, with a moral message as a central theme. If you listen to it from the factual level, you may agree with it or disagree with it, depending on who you are, how and when you heard the parable, and the circumstances of your life. For example, many of Jesus’ parables sound familiar to us, but very few of us have lived on a farm, depending on the crops we planted to survive. Unless God’s Spirit reveals it, no one can listen to Jesus’ parable and hear the moral, the theme. It’s a nice story, but it has no real meaning beyond the facts presented. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, teaches us and opens us to the deeper meaning, a spiritual meaning which those who do not have faith cannot understand. They have ears, but are unable to hear the spiritual message of Jesus’ words, because they are spiritual deaf. Is it any wonder that 80% of Americans say that they are seeking spiritual fulfillment? I think not. The question is: are they ready and willing to turn to Jesus to receive it?

The theme of the first parable is a reminder that God works in, around, and through us in ways we can’t imagine. God is sovereign and God’s will cannot be thwarted. We are to remember our mortality and serve God wholeheartedly, for the day of judgment will come. On that day, those who are faithful and true will receive the benefits God promised.

The theme of the second parable is that God will bless us greatly through seemingly small, insignificant things. The beginning of salvation and life eternal started with the birth of a child to a young woman in a manger. In that still, quiet way, God came to save us. In the same still, quiet way God is present and active in the world today. True

acts of kindness that are led by the Spirit are some of the ways seeds of faith are planted today. Jesus’ words have as much meaning and relevance for the way we live our lives as they did 2,000 years ago.

Do you hear what Jesus teaches us? Do you feel compelled – in a good way – to say “yes” when you hear God prompting you? Is your “yes” really “yes” and not “no”? We are all called by God to serve, to work serve in some kind of ministry. God gave us gifts to equip us and calls us to put them to good use. That’s what it means to be a Christian, one who follows Christ. As United Methodists, we believe we are part of the ministry of all believers. We are all part of the body of Christ on Earth, the Church, disciples of our Lord and Savior. We are all called to play a role n ministry. There are no seats on the sidelines: you are either in the game or you aren’t on the field.

There is no question you have a call. The question is whether you will accept Jesus, hear the call and answer it. I pray you have ears to hear – today!

If you feel God tugging on your heart, I invite you to pray:

O God, your grace and love make all things possible. Thank you for coming to earth to save us and to open the kingdom of God to all who love you and believe in you. Lord, forgive me for those times when I follow my own ambition, when my “yes” is “no,” and when I turn away and refuse to hear. Open my ears, soften my heart and transform my mind, so that I will serve you with faith and reach out to others in love each and every day. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Psalm 20 (NRSV)

The LORD answer you in the day of trouble! The name of the God of Jacob protect you! May he send you help from the sanctuary, and give you support from Zion. May he remember all your offerings, and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices. *Selah* May he grant you your heart's desire, and fulfill all your plans. May we shout for joy over your victory, and in the name of our God set up our banners. May the LORD fulfill all your petitions. Now I know that the LORD will help his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with mighty victories by his right hand. Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the LORD our God. They will collapse and fall, but we shall rise and stand upright. Give victory to the king, O LORD; answer us when we call.

Mark 4:26-34 (NRSV)

He also said, “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. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

He 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, 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.”

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.