

Sermon for Sunday, June 17, 2012 Pentecost III/Father's Day/Baptisms Mark 4:25-34 "The God of Possibilities"

A few weeks ago, we celebrated Mother's Day, and the children who were in the Sunday School planted lovely little petunias in buckets as gifts to their moms. It was an apt gift – what does a mother do but to help her child grow and blossom? To be fair, we should acknowledge that fathers do the same thing, encouraging, caring, coaching, guiding. Parents do wonderful things for their children, purely out of love for them.

But there is a mystery in all this parenting business, isn't there? You never know quite what will encourage your children to do better, to try harder, to explore bravely. What works for one child may not work for another. It isn't simply a matter of putting a seedling in the dirt, adding water, and then sitting back to enjoy the show. Some marvelous thing happens that energizes a seedling, or a child, and suddenly, there is the blossoming wonder. And doesn't it surprise us, when we see our child grown and graduating from school, or doing marvelous things at work, or becoming parents themselves? We look at our child and we remember the moment when the child was born, took her first steps, went off to kindergarten. And for all our hard work, we recognize that it is God's work in that precious child that makes their unique gifts come to fruition.

In a few minutes, we will baptize three little children. It is a beautiful exciting time, and doing this on Father's Day makes this extra-special, because we are dedicating them to their heavenly Father even as we celebrate their earthly fathers.

One of the things that always strikes me as we celebrate baptisms is how little we know about these children. They are at the beginning of their lives – how could we know anything about them? We can only guess at how they might develop over the years and what kind of people they will become. One might be a soccer player. Another might be a nuclear physicist, and another might write the great American novel. Or they might do something we can't even imagine, because it hasn't been invented yet.

Each precious child is like one of those mustard seeds that Jesus talks about in the Gospel we heard today. Who knows how they will grow? Only their heavenly Father, who sparks their souls. If we try to imagine what we will become, the full breadth of their possibilities, we most likely will underestimate them, as those who were around the toddler Jesus probably did. But God knew what Jesus was about, just as God knows what each and every child is about. God is the God of possibilities, the most expansive and surprising and exciting possibilities.

We don't know the mechanics of how a child develops into the adult we will see twenty years hence – that's some of the mystery of the God of possibilities working in us. It's like the seed that sprouts and grows and eventually becomes a full-grown grain of wheat, ready for harvest. We don't know how they grow. We do know, though, in plants and in children, that growth and development is inevitable, and that the child we now see in diapers or in little light-up sneakers will one day be an adult that contributes to a better world.

In a way, the story of that growth is like a parable. Each of us is a parable, a retelling of the love of God for every one of his children. Each of us shows how uniquely God has gifted us, and how miraculously He has shaped us into the people that we become over time.

We learn this from Jesus, the teller of parables. Jesus not only tells parables, he becomes a parable, a pattern for relationship with the Heavenly Father who formed us all. Think about it: he was a child whose beginnings were less than auspicious. He was born into a simple family, under difficult circumstances. And yet he grows into someone we could never have imagined if we had been present in the Galilee in the year of his birth. He shows us through his life and death how we should live our lives – bravely, with great love and concern for all of creation, recognizing that the things that truly matter are not earthly power or wealth, but love. He is the mustard seed which grows into a mighty bush sheltering all the birds. He is the child of possibilities grown into the one who redeems all humanity.

We are the seedlings, still striving upwards toward the sunlight. These children who will be baptized are the smallest and most fragile of seedlings, and in their baptism we will ask God to continue to spark their spirit with love, to wash away any misdeeds that they may do, to hold them close. Just as a plant needs water to grow, so too do we need the water of baptism to help us grow.

But unlike those little plants the children gave us for Mother's Day, once we have been watered in baptism, we never need another watering. We are infused by God's love and protection. We will continue to grow and blossom, each in our own unique way. May the water which washed and fed us in our own baptisms sustain us and enliven our hearts, to be as generous and in love with God and each other as Jesus taught us. May we be more than mustard seeds...rather, may we be the most vibrant and luxuriously leafy as the greatest garden.

Bless these children, and all children who are baptized today around the world. Bless those of us who are given the charge to care for them, to water them so they may grow. May the blessings of the Heavenly Father, the God of all possibilities, be upon us all.

Amen.