

The Third Sunday after Pentecost  
June 14, 2015  
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## Understanding and Misunderstanding

Jesus knew that his disciples would gradually grow into understanding his teaching and, more importantly, the meaning of his life, death and resurrection. The disciples didn't understand the mysterious, often paradoxical, meanings of his parables; they didn't understand why he wanted to go to Jerusalem to confront the Pharisees and Chief Priests; they didn't understand his actions at the Last Supper; and, they didn't understand the resurrection appearances.

Jesus even told them that later, after his death and resurrection, they would grow into understanding. The Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth. (John 16:13) As the disciples lived by this Spirit and tried to bring God's love to the world, they came to a clearer understanding. Yet there would always be the mystery of God, the mystery of God's Kingdom, breaking into the world.

This reality – the reality of both misunderstanding and growing in our understanding of God – should give each one of us a great deal of comfort and a constant source of hope. We don't have to have all the answers. People grow in faith in many different ways, at many different times. Be patient and trust yourself and others.

Jesus often told stories, parables of farming, of nature. Today we hear of the sower, the farmer, who scatters seed and, then, waits for the harvest. He has to wait patiently for God to give the growth. He has to trust in God's grace and power.

This grace and power can be seen as the tiniest seed grows into a great shrub. This surprising reality of grace and power is a sign of God's Kingdom. Mark wrote his Gospel some 30 years after Jesus' resurrection, yet already the church had grown, multiplied, spread all around the Mediterranean Sea and to distant lands. A tiny movement was beginning to change the world. Mark uses the Greek word we translate "immediately" 42 times in his short gospel. The Kingdom of God is here and now. Seek it. Live it. Share it with others.

Yet this is the paradox, the mystery that leads to great misunderstandings, misunderstandings that can lead to horrific events, just as the Jewish leaders misunderstood Jesus and had him crucified.

If the Kingdom of God has come, why is evil so strong? If God's love triumphs, why do we experience so much pain and death? When our lives are challenged by sin and darkness, where is God to help us?

Mark ends this fourth chapter of his Gospel with the familiar story of Jesus calming the storm while in the boat with his disciples. The story will be the Gospel for next Sunday. So we have a whole week to think about the disciples saying to Jesus after they wake him from sleep as the storm rages on, "*Don't you care that we are perishing?*" And we need to hear Jesus' response – over and over – again. "*Peace...why are you afraid...Have you no faith?*"

Most of us want to continue to grow in our faith, in our trust, in our love, in our hope. We do grow by God's grace and power in mysterious ways. God wants us to plant seeds of love in the lives we are given. God wants us to sow the love of Jesus, tell the story of the mustard seed, of the Kingdom, in ways that will help people to move from misunderstanding God to understanding, to accepting God's love.

And always there will be the mystery, the mystery of growth, the mystery of love. Baptism is a good place to celebrate the mystery. We pray the babies we baptize today will grow in so many ways. We hope they will grow in love, grow in wisdom, and grow into their God-given gifts.

They will grow in the Spirit. It is up to parents, Godparents, this parish to plant seeds of trust and hope and love so that faith may grow. All God's children need to have this chance to know, to discover how much they are loved, how much they can love, and how much this love can change the world.

Ezekiel 17:22-24  
Psalm 92:1-4, 11-14  
2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17  
Mark 4:26-34