

"Seeds of Peace and Other Seeds"

Pentecost 8: July 10, 2005-07-04

Matt. 13/Isaiah 55

After a week like this one with the terrible bombings in London,  
It's hard to see any signs of hope, but still, it's terribly  
important--to look, to look for encouraging Signs.

As bleak as things may seem, they are there.

One of the more encouraging things that I encountered while I was  
at Tantur, at the Ecumenical Study Center off of Hebron Rd.,  
was a group of enthusiastic young people in a program called  
"Seeds of Peace".

They would bring together Jewish, Christian, and Muslim  
children from Israel and Palestine to become  
acquainted, to hear each other's stories, to play together,  
and to learn how to respect themselves and each other,  
and to challenge expressions of racism when they  
encountered it at school, at home, or on the street.

Although the group sponsors "international Summer camps" in the  
US, where children of the three faiths could go out of the  
country, they also had shorter "weekend events" at Tantur. I  
was privileged to sit in on one of the sessions where the  
children did "show and tell", where they brought a valued  
possession to show to each other and tell why it was  
important to them.

One young Palestinian brought a beautifully embroidered dress  
that she said she got from her mother and grandmother and  
that she hoped to wear some day at her wedding.

A young Christian Palestinian passed along a small carved  
olive wood cross.

One young man passed around a Computer CD with his  
favorite computer game on it.

I sat in the back watching this go on, thinking about how hopeful  
and energetic the young volunteers were, encouraging the  
children and affirming them no matter what they shared.

The Group also discussed how to respond to people who discrimin-

ate against others. Some of their suggestions seemed a bit naive but they wanted to give the children some tools. The entire event was encouraging, and knowing that there are groups like that patiently working to bring children together—Palestinian and Israeli, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—so that they could learn to know and respect each other. Events like that could change the lives of the children who are involved, but I also believe that hearing their story is a seed of hope that we all need especially when things seem grim.

It is the faith of those volunteers that reminds me of the "Sower" in the familiar "Parable of the Sower" that we heard this morning. Knowing the walls of prejudice, of indifference, of peer pressure, of intimidation, of anger, of selfishness, of hopelessness that are so much a part of the lives of so many of these children. Even in the face of terrorism.

Those volunteers just kept on sowing those seeds, seeds of compassion, respect, concern, interest in the other person's story, enthusiasm, and a very practical sense of fair play.

So much like the sower in the parable: They kept sowing seeds no matter how hopeless it may seem at the time: With rocky soil, scorching sun and wind, hard beaten paths, birds devouring seeds, weeds choking young plants. The odds against the seeds producing a crop may look pretty grim.

But then that was true for Jesus too—Healing people in the synagogues and on street corners, whether it was the Sabbath or not, telling parables, even as people were plotting against him, calling him Belzebul, questioning his authority. trying to trap him.

Still sowing his seeds. Sometimes I think we forget how negative the response was that Jesus encountered even fairly early his ministry. After a few days like Jesus had, you would wonder how he could keep going. How does he keep going in the face of all of that?

You see, the sower is the one who really had faith—faith in the seed. In the face of all of that opposition, to keep on sowing the seeds, believing that those seeds would grow and produce a crop. It's a powerful image.

I have seen the literal results of sowing seeds in unlikely places: The desert of Arizona looks like the most unlikely place for seeds to be growing: Barren rocky canyons, dried-up stream beds, huge flats that look so barren and lifeless that "a crow would have to carry a sack lunch" as the old timers would say. And out of that rock—cedar trees with roots that somehow find enough soil in a tiny crack to take-hold. Flowers blooming in an empty plot of sand. A little rain and the seeds do take hold, and the sower's faith is justified. Seeds will even take root and grow in cracks in the cement--with time, even in the walls. I have even seen plants growing in cracks in the Turkish walls around the Old City. Seeds will sprout in the most unlikely looking spots.

But it isn't just groups like "Seeds of Peace". I think about the teleconference over at Notre Dame back on June 26 and a Jewish woman that I spoke with from near Ein Kerem who wanted to see an end to the hostilities and the tensions. She was so soft spoken and very apologetic, but she had come to add her voice to the others who made-up the quiet main stream of the three religions who want to see an end to the Terrorisn and the hopelessness that spurs that.

Hosted by Dan Rather, it involved a group in Washington D.C., and groups that were meeting at synagogues, mosques, and churches in 50 different locations across the US, and groups in Egypt, Jordan, and South America.

They had a large screen satellite downlink with panelists including Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious and political from Jerusalem and Washington, D.C.. It included Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, president emeritus of the University of Notre Dame, Congressman Peter King from the US House of Representatives, Sheikh Imad Falouji from the Palestinian

Legislative Council from Jabalia, Gaza, the Right Rev. Riah Abu El Assal, Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs in Jerusalem, American Jewish Committee, Imam Yahya Hendi, Chaplain from Georgetown University in Washington, Rabbi Paul Menitoff, of the Central Conference of American Rabbis Rev. Leighton Ford from the Billy Graham Association and World Vision, and Rev. Dr. J. Martin Bailey Advisor of Churches for Middle East Peace.

That's a lot of people sowing seeds! People sowing seeds, often unaware that so many others are doing the same thing.

I think we can become cynical and hopeless about our efforts at sowing seeds. We forget the many others who are doing their own part, planting seed against the odds too.

A wonderful thing about the seeds is that no matter how hopeless it may look. No matter how dead and dried-up those seeds may look on the outside. The only thing that keeps them from growing, is if they don't get planted in the first place. The only seeds that I know positively won't grow, are the ones that are still in their packets in the drawer. And even if the seeds are left on the shelf "too long" like some palm seeds that they found down at Masada. Scientists here in Jerusalem planted these 2000 year old seeds and now we have palm seedlings that are young and growing and yet over 2000 years old. I know of a variety of pinto beans from an ancient pueblo in the desert Southwest with the same kind of story.

There is something amazingly hopeful and powerful about sowing seeds: Seeds of peace, seeds of understanding, seeds of the power of God's Love and God's word changing our world and changing our lives. May we have the boldness to continue following our Lord, planting those amazing seeds. Amen.