

Homily Oct 5 2025 27th Sunday in OT © Teresa Elder Hanlon 2025

Isaiah 52: 6-10; Psalm 119; 2 Timothy 1:1-9a, 14; Luke 13:18-21; 17:5-6, 20-25

In the gospel today, Jesus knows something profound in his understanding of his relationship with Creator, the Source of All Life. What is that? It is that he has experienced the good road as the First Nation's Version refers to it, or the kin-dom. And now he wants to share that intimacy with those he is teaching, those who will bear this message out into the world.

What is the good road like? – It is like planting the smallest of seeds, a mustard seed. That's rather curious because a mustard seed is small. It doesn't look like much. However, it is what happens when the conditions are just right after planting that makes a mustard seed like the kin-dom. Walking the good road is transformative like when a seed opens. I believe that it is what is hidden *within* a seed, the unseen and unanticipated that speaks to our relationship with the Holy One. When the secret contents are released, or unleashed, the experience, while incredible is profound in its life-giving abundance.

The plant grows and matures and its branches, those limbs that extend to a great breadth become supports for birds. And part of that maturation is that lots more seeds show up too. The kin-dom is like that – abundance.

So what *is* it that is hidden in the mustard seed? Or in the yeast? that can be compared to our relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit? This week I listened to an Indigenous wisdomkeeper Karl Keeshing or *Wabuno Geezis* (Morning Sun) from the Chippewas of Nawash in what is now known as the Great Lakes area in Ontario. His Midewin Lodge tradition revealed to him that the Spirit of Creator lives in each of us. He told of how, as a teenager, 35 years ago he turned to a traditional practice of prayer with Creator. It began by talking to the Great Spirit as though to a loving grandfather and it changed his life. He mentioned that the rituals of the Midewin Lodge woke him up to a relationship of love that has nurtured him ever since.

Scripture and the Chippewa wisdomkeeper both tell us that this hidden source of life is in all of us – it is not a list of commands, but a force of goodness waiting to be released and mature. The same power of Creation that brings forth a plant or raises a batch of dough resides in us.

In Isaiah we hear that in a loving relationship with people, God's arm is bared. This is a warrior image, but used metaphorically in this context it describes an action of justice. It is not about war or the righting of wrongs through violence.

Barnes Notes on the Bible tells us that

"The loose sleeve of the Arab shirt, as well as that of the outer garment, leaves the arm so completely free, that in an instant the left hand passing up the right arm makes it bare; and this is done when a person, a soldier, for example, about to strike with the sword, intends *to give the arm full play*. The image represents Yahweh as suddenly prepared to inflict some tremendous, yet righteous [change or] judgment, so effectual "that all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God." The phrase 'holy arm,' seems to mean that God would be engaged in a holy and just cause. It would not be an arm of conquest, or of oppression; but it would be made bare in a holy cause, and all its inflictions would be righteous. (emphasis added).¹
End quote

¹ Sourced online <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/isaiah/52-10.htm>

The “full arm, free to move” has been set free, and unimpeded it is like the opening of the mustard seed and the subsequent plant that in time supports several birds’ nests. The bush aids good things like justice, like life.

It is like the baked bread of a few cups of flour made into several loaves --enough to pass around to nourish many mouths around the table.

Within each one of us is a bit of Creator that, when nurtured can grow. The writer of the letter to Timothy is aware of this in their relationship with the risen Jesus: This early church pastor encourages us “**to trust** in the good road of the Great Spirit.” And also says that “My aim in telling you these things is that you would walk the path of love with a pure heart, being true to what you trust in and honest to who you are deep inside. It is an energy of life and growth hidden. In the right conditions, it is released.”

The “right conditions” are key to bringing alive a loving relationship with someone or something. Jesus describes a powerful love within us that can be activated as compassion in the difficult times and the painful moments and the desperate conditions of conflict. Addressing the pain in the world is really about us getting in touch with the best part of ourselves and amplifying it through conditions of loving relationships, ritual and silence.

Richard Wagamese points out in the opening prayer for wholeness (*Embers* p. 86), that it is in ritual, in the repetition of actions like burning sweetgrass or incense or, as he says in today’s opening prayer, to sit in nature and listen, that releases the good road, the true self, that energy which is hidden in the seed of the kin-dom within each of us.

I remember Diné or Navajo wisdomkeeper Pat McCabe mentioning that when she found herself divorced and without work, she sat in silence at a small altar in her home for many hours day after day. She said that what she heard from Creator later is that not one minute of that time was wasted. The daily ritual of stillness, of putting her trust in Creator while being quiet were necessary preparation for what came next: She received the teachings on water and songs that she now shares with spiritual directors and others worldwide today.

It may be smaller than a mustard seed, but with the conditions of unconditional love, of stillness, of quiet, of immersing ourselves in nature whether watching waves, listening to leaves in the wind or feeling the earth when we sit on it, the good road opens up, the kin-dom expands. All of these actions encourage the eventual emergence of kindness to others, of Christ’s love lived out compassionately in our lives.

I don’t know that the message bearers of the first century understood what Jesus was talking back then when he tried to describe his intimate and growing relationship with the Source of All Being. I find the planting of the mustard seed parable is mysterious now, too. However, when we hear of (or experience our own) lives transformed from selfishness to a more generous nature or from judgemental to unconditional caring and acceptance of others – I do sense that the magic of the mustard seed, the good road walk, the flow of the kin-dom is underway.

QUESTIONS for BREAKOUT ROOMS: What did you notice in today’s liturgy, in these readings? What has been the good road walk for you? or the kin-dom? or a relationship of unconditional love in your life?- a pet, a grandparent or parent, friend, etc.