

The Life Is in the Seed

Doug Murren, in *Churches That Heal* (1999), retells that old Native American tale of an opossum watching a seed grow.

One day an opossum visited his good friend, a raccoon, at his home near the river. The opossum marveled at his friend's lush garden and asked if he could grow one like it. The raccoon assured the opossum he could do so, although he cautioned him, "It is hard work." The opossum eagerly vowed to do the hard work necessary, then asked for and received some seeds. He rushed home with his treasure, buried them amid much laughter and song, went inside to clean up, ate, and went to bed. The next morning, he leapt from bed to see his new garden. Nothing. The ground looked no different than it had the day before! Furious with anger and frustration, the opossum shouted at his buried seeds, "Grow, seeds, grow!" He pounded the ground and stomped his feet. But nothing happened. Soon a large crowd of forest animals gathered to see who was making all the commotion and why. The raccoon came to investigate with all the others. "What are you doing, Opossum?" he asked. "Your racket has awakened the whole forest." The opossum railed about having no garden, then turned to each seed, and commanded it to grow. When the animals began to mock the opossum for his silly actions, he only screamed louder. At last, the raccoon spoke up once more. "Wait a minute, Possum," he said. "You can't make the seeds grow. You can only make sure they get sun and water, then watch them do their work.

The life is in the seed, not in you." As the truth sank in, the opossum ceased his yelling and began to care for the seeds as the raccoon instructed, watering them regularly and getting rid of any weeds that invaded his garden. (On some days, though, when no one was watching, he still shouted a bit.)

Then one glorious morning the opossum wandered outside to see that multitudes of beautiful green sprouts dotted his garden. Just a few days later, gorgeous flowers began to bloom. With uncontrollable excitement and pride, the opossum ran to his friend, the raccoon, and asked him to witness the miracle. The raccoon took one long look at the thriving garden and said, "You see, Opossum, all you had to do was let the seeds do the work while you watched."

"Yes," smiled the opossum, finally remembering the wise words of his friend many days before, "but it's a hard job watching a seed work."

Doug Murren concludes: "There's a lesson there for all of us. Sometimes, as Christians and church leaders, we work too hard and take ourselves too seriously instead of simply planting people in the proper environment and letting them grow."

(by Doug Murren, in *Churches That Heal: Becoming a Church That Mends Broken Hearts and Restores Shattered Lives* [West Monroe, La: Howard Publishing, 1999], 13-14, 15.) (Adapted by Leonard Sweet from *Collected Sermons*, www.Sermons.com)

Sowing the Seed

One of William Barclay's friends tells this story. In the church where he worshiped there was a lonely old man, old Thomas. He had outlived all his friends and hardly anyone knew him. When Thomas died, this friend had the feeling that there would be no one to go to the funeral so he decided to go, so that there might be someone to follow the old man to his last resting-place.

There was no one else, and it was a miserable wet day. The funeral reached the cemetery, and at the gate there was a soldier waiting. An officer, but on his raincoat there were no rank badges. He came to the grave side for the ceremony, then when it was over, he stepped forward and before the open grave swept his hand to a salute that might have been given to a king. The friend walked away with this soldier, and as they walked, the wind blew the soldier's raincoat open to reveal the shoulder badges of a brigadier general.

The general said, "You will perhaps be wondering what I am doing here. Years ago Thomas was my Sunday School teacher; I was a wild lad and a sore trial to him. He never knew what he did for me, but I owe everything I am or will be to old Thomas, and today I had to come to salute him at the end." Thomas did not know what he was doing.

No preacher or teacher ever does. Keep sowing the seed. We can leave the rest to God, including keeping the fire going. And that is *GOOD* news for all us tenant farmers. (by David E. Leininger from *Collected Sermons*, www.Sermons.com)

God and Three Pennies

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, India died as a world-known figure. But who would have ever thought she would have attained such influence when she first began? What did she have to recommend her? A tiny woman, she began with the most meager of resources. Mother Teresa told her superiors, "I have three pennies and a dream from God to build an orphanage." "Mother Teresa," her superiors said, "you can't build an orphanage with three pennies . . . with three pennies you can't do anything."

"I know," she said, smiling, "but with God and three pennies I can do anything."

Mother Teresa understood the principle of the seed. It takes very little -- but very little blessed by God -- and miracles can occur. This, of course is akin to Jesus' teaching elsewhere, that faith only the size of a mustard seed can produce an enormous bush (Matthew 17:20). That is a constant law in God's world.

(by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com)