

Proper 10, Year A

July 13, 2014

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Belvedere

The Rev. Shari Young, preacher

Today is Bird Sunday: In the spirit of "Earth and Altar;" our parish focus; we are celebrating all things "bird" today. I myself am an early bird, a morning lark. I like to go to bed early, and get up early. If I miss the early light around 5am, I feel like I am out of balance all day.

One of the things I especially like about the pre-dawn time is the symphony of bird songs that happens at first light. I go out on our deck and listen to many different birds sing; it's as if they think they are singing the sun up.

My husband is a night owl: He is not sleepy until late, after midnight. Owls are nocturnal. At night as I lay in bed, I often hear an owl hooting outside our house. To hear an owl is always magical and exceptional to me. Whenever I hear an owl hoot, I pause and listen closely for the next sound. It always seems like something special.

We get to see an owl up close and personal after church today during Coffee Hour. Thanks to our parish friends Tom Rusert and Darren Peterie who invited them, Sonoma Bird Rescue is coming to visit us with a barn owl.

But birds are not just here for our joy and pleasure: As members of ecosystems, birds play many important roles, including as predators, pollinators, scavengers, seed dispersers, seed predators, and ecosystem engineers. They help humans in very specific ways such as eating insects who threaten agriculture; as well as pesky rodents, such as the owl does.

In fulfilling this role as helpers with pest control, owls have become seriously threatened. We use poison to kill rodents. Rodents eat poison, and take a while to die, and the owls eat the poisoned rodents.... You will find out more today when you see the owl.

There are birds in today's gospel of the sower. Their role in this parable is the gobbling up of some of the seed spread abroad by the sower. The parable of the sower and its interpretation is an image of the Spirit, and the teaching of God's word by prophet and messiah.

The image is of a little tiny seed: The Word of God as a small seed

+An image of the smallness and gentleness of God among us

+An image of the constant and inevitable presence of God as a seed which eventually flowers in all situations.

+An image of the potential in each of us to go more deeply into a holy life of peace, joy and God's presence.

God calls and invites us; in "a still small voice;" and we listen and respond.

Seeds are the image. Little things which are potential; they grow into something else especially when nurtured.

Let's look at this parable from the perspective of the sower. Let's take the role of the sower. What is the effect of the seeds we cast?

In the OT saga of Jacob, of which we hear part today: we see the effect of seeds planted by parents who pit the brothers against each other again and again. Rachel the mother loved Jacob; and the dad, Isaac, favored Esau. The brothers grew up to contend, and struggle and hate each other. The seeds were planted by the parents over many years.

We cast many seeds abroad during the course of our life. One obvious place we plant seeds, is in the minds and psyches of our children. These seeds are generally words or phrases which get internalized. Oftentimes we don't even realize we are doing this...

We also have such words and phrases stuck inside us planted there by our parents. They are like bamboo; they keep putting up shoots, and we have to weed them out over and over.

There is a TV ad nowadays about the effect of words on girls in relationship to math: "Let your brother do it," "that's too hard for you" etc.

Of course, we also plant seeds of love which blossom later: You are loved unconditionally, you are capable and responsible; you are creative; you make good choices.

During the course of our life, we also plant many seeds in our relationships with siblings, spouses, and friends as well as in the lives of others and in the world. Some of us have the opportunity to plant seeds which have a major impact; perhaps on the culture of a business or company or corporation; perhaps on government policy; perhaps for the benefit of our planet.

I just saw a wonderful movie called "Belle," based on the true story of William Murray, Earl of Mansfield also Lord Chief Justice of England, who lived in the 18th century. At this time, the economy of England at this time was heavily dependent on the slave trade. Lord Mansfield was called upon to rule in a case involving a slave ship, its owners, and those who insured its human cargo. His decision in 1786 against the interests of the slave ship owners was greatly anticipated, had enormous social pressure against it, and is considered to be an important seed of dissent contributing to the Abolition Act in 1807. His action planted one seed which led to the abolition of slavery.

We all have important seeds to sow: some seeds for the literal benefit of birds; some for our children and families, some for our workplace, some for our world.

Mostly these seeds are words; positive words of love and life and affirmation which bring the seeds of the spirit into our world. Let us be mindful of the seeds we sow.