

## **FAITH AND RISK**

As we approach the end of June, we'll soon witness the advent of another season of buying fresh fruits and vegetables grown right here in Essex County. The seeds of harvest planted earlier will come to yield, and we'll all have the benefit of their ripening. We're fortunate to live where we do, where the combination of fertile ground and supportive climate give us an abundance of food. It's what leads some people to refer to our geographic location as *God's back yard*. We're also fortunate to have farmers who take the risk each year of planting seeds with the hope they will grow to full yield. And it's a risk beyond their ability to control, as we saw with last year's heavy rains leading to a one month delay in the availability of fresh corn on the cob. Indeed, once the seeds are planted, one can only leave it to other forces as to what will result.

Most of us can identify with this process. Each fall and spring, we plant seeds on our properties hoping they will yield flowers, grass and even vegetables. We carefully till the soil, follow the instructions of how to tend them, and wait for the end result. We've become so accustomed to this practice that we seldom stop to think of the miracle of it all – the miracle of how a flower in all its beauty can grow from one tiny seed. We enjoy the fresh taste of our vegetables taking their yield for granted. But I would think that we indeed still marvel at the birth of a child, itself grown to fullness from just a tiny seed. Moments like this can instill in us a sense of awe and wonder at the miracle of life itself. As the United Church's *Song of Faith* doctrine observes, 'God is Holy Mystery, beyond complete knowledge, above perfect description.' (2006)

And so it's fitting that Jesus would use the concept of a seed when describing the kingdom of God. A close look at the imagery in a sense can be interpreted as describing our faith journeys through life, here on earth. Our faith develops throughout our lifetime from childhood through to adulthood and beyond. Through night and darkness, and daytime and light, our experiences help to shape our view of the world. Although the parable doesn't mention it, we have

experienced times of doubt – times where life’s circumstances caused us to question the presence of a loving Creator. Yet as we came through these times, we experienced a more mature faith, based in the belief that we are not alone. As we heard in our NOW Testament reading, religion [faith] seems to act as a palliative for believers. It buffers us against the pains of everyday living, it offers meaning, and it structures our understanding of the world. The parable goes on to describe the stages of growth from seed to full harvest. One can compare this *harvest* to our own spiritual wisdom, although with the acceptance that we will never understand it all. Fortunately, mature faith doesn’t require it.

And beyond our individual faith journeys, we’re all a part of the Westminster journey. Some members have been on this journey longer than others, although the majority of us will attest that our rituals and practices have evolved over the years. In our maturing, we’ve loosened the strict practices of the past toward a more inviting atmosphere. Our Communion table is open to all who declare themselves as followers of Christ. People of varying sexual orientations are welcomed into marriage within our sanctuary. We’re less afraid of the unknown and more willing to open our minds and hearts to embrace the questions of life. The seeds of our faith are in some way still seeds, constantly being stoked and tilled by life’s events, yielding to harvests that we had not even imagined in an earlier time. And in another dimension, while the deed of ownership of our building will eventually change, it should have no bearing on the roots of our individual and collective faiths. We’re still called to be God’s people. And we’ll still have the presence of Jesus to guide us.

To conclude, it’s interesting that the theme of this year’s London Conference gathering was stated as ‘*Bloom where you are planted*’. Whether in a work environment, a volunteer activity, in our homes, or here at church, the harvest of our faith should always be at the forefront of our individual actions. In a practical sense, when deciding on our behaviours and actions, we can ask *What might Jesus want us to do? What would make him smile and say, ‘good stuff!’* Our

blessing to the world will continually be felt when we live spiritually from the harvest of our personal faith.

**Preface to Prayer “Deep in our Hearts” MV 154, v 1**

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Creator God, our help in ages past, we give thanks for all you have given us in our life journeys to this point in time – for parents and teachers who believed in us and encouraged us to develop those talents and gifts that we often did not see in ourselves; for friends and family who have stood with us through the years and lent their support and strength during those times when we struggled; for those who came before us here at Westminster, establishing it first as a mission, and then devoting their faith energies to helping it grow into a vital Christian community – soften our personal doubts and help us reach within ourselves and unlock our inner talents that they may be shared with your world.

Eternal God, our hope for years to come, we move forward as a people of faith into a new phase – through past uncertainty we have rediscovered your light, and we continue on the path you have set before us – make clear your needs of us, and help us as we follow where you lead – may this time of new beginnings for us be a comforting reminder that you are always with us, and that we do not walk our paths alone.

Healing God, we ask your presence among those who are ill in body, mind or spirit, be they family, friend, or stranger – those who have lost sight of the light within – help us to be a beacon for them in their time of need and to stand with them when they reach out – may they know we are Christians by our love. And now Lord, we offer to you our own silent prayers...

And hear us now as we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us...Our Father, who art in heaven – Hallowed be thy name – thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven – give us this day our daily bread – and forgive us our trespasses – as we forgive those who trespass against us – and lead us not into temptation – but deliver us from evil - for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory – for ever and ever – AMEN.