

Look at these trees.

Mighty, majestic, offering shade and relief and places for birds.

Each one of these began as a seed, maybe an acorn, a seed carried on the wind
which took root somewhere as circumstances were right for it to
grow and flourish and grow into the purpose for which it was made.

Who knew what it was going to grow into?

If these trees could talk they could tell us of years of flourishing

followed by years of adversity; of times the punishing winds came
and twisted their very trunk around;

of seasons of sun and breezes and rains which brought sweet nurture
and the roots reaching into the river helped them grow strong and healthy.

Who knew what it was going to grow into?

We were once seeds – planned or accidental,

anxiously awaited, we hope, by parents who conceived us in love,
who had hopes and dreams for the kind of people we would become,
carrying on their legacy, making the world a better place, thriving in joy.

Who knew what we were going to grow into? Are still growing into?

Our growth too is affected by blessing and adversity, by how much sunlight
we receive, by how well our roots reach nurturing water and nutrients,
by how well we take care of each other as trees take care of each other.

Who knew what we were going to grow into? Are still growing into?

Our churches were once seeds.

These 350-year-old churches with their old and lovely buildings were once an idea
in the mind of a settler hungry for community, hungry for connection to God;
a yearning among a group of people seeking a place to gather and worship
and baptize their children and become a community.

Who knew what they were going to grow into? Are still growing into?

And if all those who have been part of our Christ Churches over the years

could speak, they would tell similar stories, seasons of growth and vibrancy,
seasons of stagnation and conflict, seasons of loss and hardship,
seasons of harvest and hope.

Who knew what we are going to grow into? Because we're not done yet. Here we are, two communities, two trees who are learning to grow together. That is our logo, in fact, two different trees whose trunks are coming together. We have been planted for a purpose, a purpose which keeps unfolding.

We were planted for a purpose, long ago.
Listen again to the prophet Ezekiel, speaking for God:

*I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar;
I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs;
I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain.
On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it,
in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar.*

The purpose of churches is to bear fruit, to be agents of God's transforming love. Jesus said, "I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last."
We are not clubs or social work societies, museums or refuges.
We are incubators of fruit and life, always growing,
and like trees, always reaching toward heaven.
We are meant to scatter seeds which may or may not sprout,
which may or may not grow, just as God has planted us.

Imagine a family new to Charles County. We'll call them the Harrisons. Maybe they moved here during the pandemic, when working from home became an option for many. Maybe there are a bi-racial family; and a blended family – they each brought children into the marriage, and have one on the way. They work hard – he commutes to DC, she works from home. They balance taking the kids to their activities with chores and recreation, and soon they'll have sports to work into their schedule. They have a yearning for spiritual connection and community, but really don't know how they're going to fit it into their crazy life. Maybe they and their friends talk around the fire pit at night about a place to gather and worship and baptize their children and become a community. The big churches in the area that offer more for families are also quite conservative and that's not who they are. They dream of a place to gather.

Is this a dream God is inviting us to be part of calling into being? The God who *"gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."*

Why don't they check us out, we wonder?

We have beautiful churches and we're wonderful, warm people.

Well – to someone who's never been to church, or who's been damaged by a church community that tried to stamp them into a certain mold, our churches are not so appealing.

Our worship is odd and old, and happens at an inconvenient time.

There is a dream in the process of being birthed – a thing that does not yet exist.

It is an idea for the Episcopal churches in Charles County to bring in a clergy person who would function in our churches but primarily be devoted to creating a worship service, not on Sunday mornings, designed for busy families.

This is something we long to do but don't have the bandwidth to tackle alone.

Pooling our resources and faith might yield some amazing fruit.

Our bishop is coming to Waldorf this Wednesday night to share her vision.

Please come and listen and bring your ideas to the mix.

We need to keep scattering seeds, for, unbeknownst to us,

some of those seeds are breaking open and starting to grow below ground, even if we can't see it until a blade or a stalk begins to appear.

Listen to another prophet, Isaiah:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

We are those oaks of righteousness. We are God's planting to display God's glory.

Are there seeds you desire to see sprout and grow?

Have you seen the tip of a blade emerging yet?

Wait, giving thanks by faith, until faith gives way to sight.

Who knows what we are going to grow into?

Amen.

Mark 4:26-34

He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.