Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





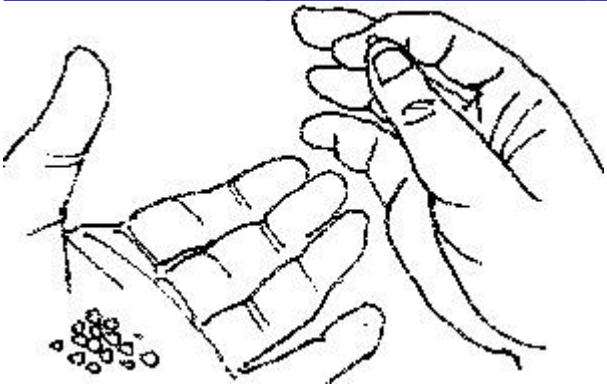
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“To what can I compare the reign of God?” (Luke 13:18).

Rom 8:18-25; Luke 13:18-21

It is characteristic of every age to think that its watch is, in the words of Charles Dickens, the “best of times and the worst of times.” Our frenetic media culture bombards us with dire warnings and the relentless drone of bad news, so why wouldn’t we imagine we are in the final rings of circling detritus going down the drain? “Have a nice day” can’t compete with that for a headline.

Hope sees beyond despair to the deeper truth that history is charged with the Holy Spirit. St. Paul in his letter to the Romans invites us to trust that God is at work in crisis and that breakthrough sometimes feels like breakdown unless we have faith. Consider Paul’s situation when he penned the lines in today’s reading from Romans, that because we are children of God, “We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now” (8:22).

Paul was likely under house arrest awaiting execution, knowing the communities he had formed were under assault from civil authorities and from infighting, and that he was regarded by some as having betrayed the traditions of the mother church in Jerusalem. Imperial Rome was poised to strike down any movement that challenged its divine pretensions. Within a decade of Paul’s death, the temple and holy city would lie in ruins and the seeds of both Judaism and Christianity would be cast to the winds in a great diaspora. Paul’s visions and dreams were by then like nightmares for many.

Yet. Paul was filled with hope because the death and resurrection of Jesus had already revealed the end of history. Jesus was the new Adam, ushering in a new Creation that gave believers a new destiny within the Beloved Community, life with God forever. The mustard seeds of faith had already been sown and the leaven of sincerity and truth was already at work within human events. What Jesus promises us in the parables we read in Luke’s Gospel today is only a glimpse of the glory to come.

Though God’s grace enters human potential as the tiniest of seeds and the invisible, tasteless and odorless enzyme that makes dough rise, it is an unstoppable promise that will accomplish its purpose. Where conception occurs, birth will follow, and the pain we experience will yield a joy that surpasses any suffering we must endure until God’s glory is revealed. To be *inspired* is to take a deep breath in the gloom and doom of human doubt and fear. “Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus,” Paul wrote to believers huddled in the heart of the empire, the culmination of his great song of reassurance in troubled times, whose verses we will read later this week (Rom 8:31-39).

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