Spirituality
Pencil Preaching

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“With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it” (Mark 4:33).

Heb 10:32-39; Mk 4:26-34

Many years ago, at my first job at a daily newspaper, one veteran reporter put professional journalism in perspective for me with the comment that newspapers were about good storytelling. He used the word “yarns,” and I understood even then that “objective” reporting was an ideal but not the reality of the scramble for news, how it was selected and framed, packaged and sold. Good reporters described and quoted, but left the interpretation to readers and to editorial writers. In the end, even the best newspapers are like the old saying about the Bible: “It is full of stories,

and some of them are true.”

The best Bible scholars seem to agree that the truth of God’s revelation is clothed in stories about human sin meeting divine mercy. The historical details of Jesus' life elude us for the most part, but he left behind a treasury of wonderful stories that reveal him. In today’s Gospel, he chose the image of seeds to tell his own stories about how life continues mysteriously, renewing each generation with another chance to get it right.

The corruption of past failures fertilizes the next wave of flowers springing up in the desert of human striving. The tiny mustard seed, carried by the wind, produces a bush big enough to give shade and nesting places for the birds. God’s love takes hold again and again, wherever there is the smallest patch of good ground willing to receive it and nurture it.

Such stories are like seeds we can plant in our hearts. A Chinese proverb says, “Keep a green tree in your heart, and the singing bird will come.” An ancient 5,000-year-old culture comes down to us in proverbs that infused later Western cultures. Jesus the teacher is more Jewish than Greek, and he is more Asian than Western. The whole Gospel is often contained in each parable, given to us not as logic or doctrine but like a lotus flower.

The Word of God comes to us daily in the Lectionary readings assigned to the celebration of the Eucharist. By hearing these Scriptures in our faith communities and with the universal church, we are being formed to receive God’s grace like tiny seeds that germinate within us, mysteriously shaping our minds and hearts to engage life. We encounter Jesus again and again in the gospel stories, teaching us and inviting us to follow him in our daily circumstances and challenges. We become disciples, listening to the Spirit, ready to act out the stories that permeate our lives and invite us to build God’s kingdom. This is the joy of the Gospel.