

## **CHANGE EQUALS GROWTH (MT 13:1-9, 18-23)**

Sermon by the Rev. Corinne Hodges  
Sunday, July 13, 2008, St. John of the Cross

It has been said that, “The one constant in life is change.” That even when things seem stable and secure on the outside, change is always happening. I don’t know about you, but I certainly have found this to be true.

One of the first instances I recall learning about change was when I was a child. I grew up in a family of four with my mom and dad and my little brother Charlie, who is two and a half years younger than me. Something happened one summer when my brother and I were teenagers that changed everything in our relationship. That summer, as Charlie drank at least a gallon of milk a day, I watched as he grew and grew. Indeed it seemed like each night God was stretching him a little bit. He’d wake up in the morning just a little bit taller, until at the end of summer, he had grown an entire six inches and stood taller than six feet! Charlie was no longer, and never would be again, my “little brother.” Sometimes growth is like this: fast, uncontrollable, it happens in one big growth spurt.

But there are other times in life when growth seems quite slow. Several years ago I was growing my hair to donate to Locks of Love, an organization that makes wigs for people who due to a medical condition cannot grow hair. To make these wigs, Locks of Love needs 10 inches of hair. This takes an adult about two years to grow. Now I can tell you that during that time growth seemed painstakingly slow. Especially that last summer, I waited and waited for growth inch by inch, centimeter by centimeter, millimeter by millimeter. There were many days when growth seemed non-existent.

The growth we have been talking about here is physical growth, but there are other kinds of growth. There is intellectual growth when we study or learn and build our mental knowledge. And there is experiential growth when through the happenings of life we gain wisdom. However, in our gospel reading today, we hear of yet another kind of growth, spiritual growth.

The parable is about seed that falls on four types of soil, yielding various degrees of growth. This story can be seen as the telling of four different kinds of people with

varying degrees of faith, but I believe a more holistic, realistic way to see it is as four different phases of growth each of us can encounter on our faith journey.

There is the path or the road. Here the birds eat up seed. These are the times in life when we hear the Word, but do not understand or take it in. It just remains on surface. There are the rocks or the gravel, where there is not much soil. This is when God's Word cannot take root. We respond instantly and enthusiastically, but when trouble hits, our faith does not endure. We fall away. Then there are the thorns: times in our life when we hear the news of Kingdom, but weeds of worry, the worries of life, stop it. Darkness overcomes the light of life. And finally, there is the good earth—rich times, we hear the Good News, take it in wholeheartedly and great things happen.

Now I have to admit that I do not have a green thumb. Several years ago I planted a house plant. It was actually two plants in one pot. One of the plants had long grassy leaves that our cat Sunny likes to eat so I decided to put the pot in a safe place in the guestroom and close the door. Well, you know what happened. Left unattended, that plant did not grow. It started to wither. Every now and then I would go into that guestroom for something and remember to water it, but the tips of leaves turned brown and dry.

A couple months ago, I went into the room and saw the pot. I decided it was finally time to do something. I separated the two plants, giving each of them their own pot with plenty of space to grow. I planted them in nutrient rich soil. I gave the grassy plant to my husband who has been living in Warsaw since February. I kept the second plant and tended to it by giving it water, sunlight, love and care.

What happened? Well, the first thing I noticed was the roots. They became stable and secure. Then the color changed. The plant became a vibrant, healthy green. Next the leaves spread and each leaf became larger, the plant wider. Finally the plant grew upward towards sky, towards God.

Our faith goes through the same phases. There are times when we experience rapid growth—huge changes in our lives when we listen and hear God's Word. We respond and embrace what God is calling us to. Now these times can still be scary,

but with firm roots grounded in the Divine, we move forward with courage and faith, knowing God is leading us. We can even discover the joy of change, transitions and new beginnings.

There are other times in life when we simply do not want to grow. We are resistant to change. We dig in our heels, look the other way, stop listening and therefore do not hear God's call to us. As a result, God feels distant.

But perhaps for most of us, we spend a lot of time in between the rocky soil and the thorns. We know in our hearts that we are being led and stretched for the better. We try to remain open, but then our heads kick in. Worry or concerns of the earthly world take over and so our growth is slow, sporadic, moving inch by inch. The bottom line and this is how it is with all of life: If we don't grow, we die.

So where are you on your faith journey? Could this be a rich time of possibility, deepening your relationship and trust in God? My friends, we are called to mature—physically, mentally and spiritually. To dig deep roots, become firmly planted in our belief in God, to spread the Word to others, and to look up and make God our focus in life. As a community of faith, we are called to do this together. For God is constantly calling us to new life. And God is never finished with our development. We are always being encouraged to be more than we have been.

As we begin our ministry together here at St. John of the Cross, I can think of no better, more inspiring message. In fact, I wonder if it is just a coincidence that this gospel reading about growth and change falls on our first Sunday. My husband Mike and I are very happy and consider ourselves blessed to be a part of this community. In many ways, our journey here seems to have come on quickly, though in the eyes of God I am not so sure. One thing I do know, and I know this with all of my heart and with all of my soul: God has brought us together in this time and in this place to do great things! As we embark on this part of the journey, I ask your prayers.

Let anyone with ears listen! May the urgings of God take hold of each one of us, finding our hearts and minds open, stretching us to new heights, heights we may never have imagined, and yielding an abundantly rich and holy harvest!