

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be aligned with yours, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.*

Two weeks ago, our diocese gathered for a joyful occasion. We celebrated the consecration of our new bishop, The Rt. Rev. Antonio Gallardo. Bishop Antonio chose four simple words from Ephesians to help kick off his episcopacy.

"Speak Truth with Love."

I've been carrying those words with me this month.

Not because they are complicated, but because they are so simple.

Simple enough for a child to understand. Challenging enough to spend a lifetime trying to live.

Speak truth.

With love.

With those words in my heart, this week's Gospel stood out.

*Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it becomes the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."*

If I were trying to describe the kingdom of God, I don't think I would have chosen a mustard seed. That's just too tiny to me.

I might have chosen a mountain.

Or an ocean.

Or a mighty oak.

Something that feels impressive.

But Jesus points to something you could easily overlook.

Something so small that, if you dropped it, you might never find it again.

And he says, "That's what God's kingdom is like."

Why?

Because Jesus knows something we often forget.

God's greatest work often begins with the smallest beginnings.

Think about your own life.

Or maybe, a conversation that changed you.

A teacher who believed in you.

A note someone wrote years ago that you still remember.

A simple invitation that brought you to church, keeps you in church, or brings you back to church.

A word of forgiveness.

At the time, none of those moments might have seemed extraordinary.

But over time, they grew into something much larger.

Seeds have a way of doing that.

So do words.

That's why Bishop Antonio's words resonate with today's Gospel.

When we speak truth with love, we are planting seeds.

Sometimes we imagine that speaking the truth means winning an argument or convincing someone else that we're right.

But Jesus rarely worked that way.

He told stories.

He asked questions.

He invited people to imagine.

He trusted that the truth, offered in love, could take root in another person's heart.

That takes patience.

After all, no one plants a mustard seed on Monday and expects a tree by Friday.

Growth takes time. The same is true in our relationships. Parents know this. Teachers know this. So do friends.

You offer encouragement. You apologize. You forgive.

You tell someone they're loved.

You tell someone the truth they need to hear, but you do it gently.

And then, you wait. You trust.

I do this quite a bit most of the year. In addition to serving as the priest associate at St. John's Cathedral, I am also the Episcopal Chaplain at USC. I have to be really patient and know I must wait to see how my words can help a person grow.

Because growth and life belong to God. I think that's one of the most freeing lessons in this parable.

We are called to plant.

God is the one who gives the growth.

St. Paul says something very similar: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."

There is great freedom in that.

It means we don't have to carry the burden of changing everyone around us.

We don't have to fix every problem.

We don't have to have the perfect words.

We simply ask ourselves: What seed can I plant today?

Perhaps it is a word of gratitude.

Perhaps it is making the first move toward reconciliation.

Perhaps it is listening before speaking.

Perhaps it is telling someone the truth they need to hear, but doing so with compassion and love instead of condemnation.

Perhaps it is reminding another person and maybe reminding ourselves, that God has not given up on us.

None of those things seems very large.

But neither does a mustard seed.

Jesus never asks us to build the kingdom by ourselves.

He asks us to trust that God's kingdom is already growing, often in ways we cannot yet see.

So this week, as we leave this place, perhaps Bishop Antonio's motto can become our prayer.

Friends, don't underestimate the smallest act of love.

A kind word.

An honest conversation.

A quiet forgiveness.

A welcome offered to someone who thought there was no place for them.

These may seem like mustard seeds to us.

But Jesus smiles and says,

"Watch what my Father can do with that."

Amen.