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Epiphany 7C – February 20, 2022

“Get Out of the Seed Box”

Read: 1 Cor. 15: 35 - 38/ Memorize 1 Cor. 15: 37 - 38

We went to see our grandchildren in November for an early Thanksgiving. When we got up again in January it seemed like all of them had grown several inches in those two short months. Perhaps you’ve experienced that in your own life?

Or you might have had an experience similar to Roxann’s this past week. A mom called her about enrolling her child in preschool next fall. The child will be 3. The last time we saw the mom, she was a three year old preschooler here. Our image of her is still of that little girl. Now, she’s a mom with an almost three year old. It is surely a fulfillment of the reminder that time only goes in one direction. Not only does it only go in one direction, it goes quickly.

I think we notice it more in children but it’s happening to us adults also. The difference for us adults is, the changes are often more inside than outside, therefore less obvious. You run into somebody as an adult whom you’ve known as an adult and you will likely recognize them, even if it’s been a while since you’ve seen them. But when they went from a three year old to a mom, it may be harder to identify her.

Perhaps the changes occur in other ways also. We wake up one day and realize that we’re not angry about something anymore. Or the worry we’ve carried around for years has lifted and we feel years lighter. We don’t have the desire to eat out as much or spend too much or gossip too much anymore.

There are different kinds of growth in our lives. Each one has an element of rebirth in it, out of one thing, comes another. That’s what Paul was dealing with in his letter to the Corinthians. We’re getting to the heart of the matter in chapter fifteen. Paul is telling people about the resurrection. Just think about this, the only person who had ever been resurrected on his own, is Jesus. So I imagine it sounded hard to everybody who heard this, to believe it. So, is it surprising that there were doubts?

At the same time, Paul wants to talk about resurrection because that's what God has in store for all who are believers in Jesus. When we know Jesus we understand that even as we face death, new life comes. It even gets better than that. Someday, we'll have a resurrected life, a physical body back, which will be even better than whatever we had. Which is really hard to understand.

So Paul takes something that he hopes would be easily understood by anyone to illustrate his point. He uses a seed. A seed looks like it's dead, yet within itself contains new life. However, what comes out of the ground won't look anything like what went into the ground.

You might say, that a seed that stays a seed is a little piece of dried out promise. When it is put into or falls into the ground, it will crack open and sprout. You really can't tell from the seed what it's going to look like. It could be a redwood or a sunflower, a tomato or a gorgeous lily. There are all kinds of promise in the seed, just as there are all sorts of promise in us, as the people of God.

The hard part is that the promise only comes to life when we let go of something else. It only goes in one direction, just like that mom who will be coming in with her little girl. Mom can't become a preschooler again. Yet, we made such an impact on her that she now wants that same faith and education experience shared with her child.

In her book *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, Rachel Remen tells about a doctor she knows, named Frank. He's a middle aged internist, and the director of a clinic. He is a good doctor, but he was struggling; thinking about leaving the field of medicine. There's a lot of pressure and a lot of stress in that profession, especially right now.

One day, he was referring to his notes before he met with a patient, Mrs. Gonzales. She was an elderly women, in the last stages of breast cancer. He didn't have any further treatment to offer her, so their visits together involved adjusting her medication and making sure she wasn't in pain.

Thinking about that visit, he found, much to his surprise that it seemed to him that he should offer to pray with her. He didn't really pray much himself and this felt like a big risk. It's not typically what a doctor does. Still, when she arrived the thought was still within him.

As they sat talking, he turned to this frail grandmother and suggested that they pray together. She heard what he said and started to cry. Taking her hand, he sat and waited.

Finally, she answered him. “That would be very wonderful, doctor.” She told him that she was Roman Catholic and asked if they could kneel down to pray. This unnerved him even more. He glanced at the door to make sure no one would see them. Then he, in his white lab coat, helped her kneel on the floor. He knelt next to her in the tiny exam room in the clinic.

He thought he was going to begin the prayer, but as soon as they got into position, Mrs. Gonzales began to pray, speaking first in Spanish, and then in English. He was somewhat relieved because it had been years since he had prayed. As she prayed, the doctor felt a sense of peace settle over him.

The sound of her voice called up a prayer from his childhood, one he hadn’t thought of in a long time. Then Mrs. Gonzales reached across and touched him on the cheek and began to pray for him and his work. She asked God to bless him and strengthen him in this work.

It has been six months since that incident, yet he says he can still feel the light touch of her hand on his face, and he found himself reaching back to that moment when he needs added strength, wisdom and patience. He thought at first, he was going to pray for her, yet the gift turned out to be her gift of prayer for him. We never know how the seed we plant will sprout and grow.

We never know what we need to let go of or let die in our lives, so that something new can be born. But by God’s grace, we get to choose. We can stay stuck in the seed, dried up, yet still full of promise. Or we can accept God’s promise of new birth into something and let go of the old. We can step into resurrection, letting each seed within us flower into something new. Or we can stay where we are, all dried up in the seed box.

God doesn’t force us to grow, but is always willing to lovingly plant us somewhere to grow. He waters the seeds within us with experiences that nurture us, to bring the bright light of wisdom to our growth. God wants us to grow and He is always ready to grow something new in us.

All He asks is that we let go and let God, so that the seed can sprout. When we do that, God can shape us into the most beautiful plant or the best person we might become. That pattern is true for our whole life and comes to fullness at the end of it, when we are reunited with all the saints in heaven. We just need to remember that in order to get that fullness of life, we need to let the seed die so that the new life can come. If we try to hold on, the seed may not sprout and will never grow.

Let us give thanks to God, the gardener of our lives, for every place of resurrection in them. Every place where something ends and a new thing begins always happens by His grace. We pray that God will keep us faithful to Him as Resurrection people. We rejoice in this new life in the name of Jesus Christ, the firstfruits of the Resurrection!

Here's your question: Where are you seeing new life around you? How will you encourage it?