



## Amid the Flecks of Light

*A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Ledlie I. Laughlin  
The Second Sunday after Pentacost ~ June 14, 2009*

Mark 4:26-34

He also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'

He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

It would get steamy hot later that day, but in the early morning the air was fresh, dry, crisp. A Saturday morning a couple of weeks ago and I was out for a good, hard bicycle ride. West River Drive was closed to cars; the only occupants were runners and cyclists. My thoughts wandered, as they do when I ride. I appreciated the smells of moist grass, trees and bushes in early bloom. I noted the contrasting light on the road; bright early sun and dark shadow intermittent. Geese and their goslings tugged at the green wet grass by the side of the road, feasting on bugs I suppose. My legs felt good; strong. I was riding hard, fast.

Then stepping from the dark shadow into bright light just in front of me was a fuzzy little gosling. I yelped, silently. It veered one way; I swerved the other, missing by mere fractions of an inch. My fast hard tires would have crushed it instantly. Mama and the siblings squawked by the side of the road – scolding, or cheering perhaps – as the little one made it safely across.

While moving fast amid the flecks of light, it is hard to see, especially the littlest goslings, the littlest creatures among us.

Last spring on this same stretch of road, as I approached, I saw the cars in each direction were stopped at an unlikely spot. Riding through to the head of the line, I grinned at the sight of half a dozen proud geese parading a long line of goslings across the road. Most of the early morning commuters smiled; one honked impatiently. Just like Quack, Mac, Lack and Jack in *Make Way for Ducklings*, I thought.

It was easy to spot them when the big geese led the way, and when there were lots of goslings together. But a couple of weeks ago, just the one, separated from the others, was almost invisible amid the flecks of light.

Moving hard and fast, it's difficult to see the littlest ones, the children or the needy who have gotten separated from their parents, from society; the destitute, the lonely, the imprisoned, the forgotten. As long as we have others around us, we can cross safely through the fast-moving traffic. Alone, it's treacherous, deadly.

I am grateful that I saw the gosling, that I didn't hit it. I am grateful when, by the grace of God, I am able to see

one of the least of God's creatures, God's children, amid the flecks of light. So often, I don't notice. I am looking further down the road, aiming at my destination. But when I see, when by grace, my eyes are open I can swerve, can change course, can respond – with care.

It is a gift: to be able to see, to notice, to taste, to hear and smell. It is a gift of the heart to see the littlest and the least among us. For then we can respond – with care.

All the time and all around us the kingdom of God is alive, pulsing with life. The seeds in the ground and the buds on the trees are growing – right now, all the time. It's a symphony out there – in here; a raging storm. Every now and again, a gosling dashes in front of us and we are blessed with a little peek, a flash of awareness and insight.

“...As if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.”

“Produces of itself”: the Greek word translated here is *automate*, from which we get automatic. The word is used through-out Scripture when, like seeds sprouting in the earth, things just happen.

When Luke describes Peter's departure from prison, assisted by an angel (Acts 12:10): “After they had passed the first and second guard, they came before the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them ... of its own accord.” *Automate*.

The Lord explained to Joshua (Joshua 6:4-5) how the walls of Jericho would fall “with seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, the priests blowing the trumpets. When they make a long blast with the ram's horn, as soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat.” *Automata*: will fall down flat.

The story (I Samuel 16:1-13) we heard of selecting the young David to be king functions on many levels, but the vital ingredient is that God is working through human agency, undermining the powerful and rich, facilitating a political coup, to accomplish divine justice, and tend to the needs of the outcast and forgotten. It's all there, pulsing just beneath the surface in the story of a little shepherd boy being called in from his flocks and given a new responsibility. A moment that changes world history forever.

It's not always our job to make something happen. A lot of the time our job is to watch, to seek the hints and signs, to notice the best we can – open our eyes, even moving fast amid the flecks of light.

Several months ago I heard the church described as a community of miraculous expectation; a community of miraculous expectation. To see the miraculous presence of the holy one, to rejoice in God, to respond to the littlest.

The late E.B. White was the author of *Charlotte's Web*, *Stuart Little*, *Trumpet of the Swan*, among others. “As [he] watched his wife Katharine planning the planting of bulbs in her garden the last autumn of her life, he wrote, “There was something comical yet touching in her bedraggled appearance... the small hunched-over figure, her studied absorption in the implausible notion that there would be yet another spring, oblivious to the ending of her own days, which she knew perfectly well was near at hand, sitting there with her detailed chart under those dark skies in dying October, calmly plotting the resurrection.

“Katharine was a member of the resurrection conspiracy, the company of those who plant seeds of hope under dark skies of grief or oppression, going about their living and dying until, no one knows how, when or where, the tender Easter shoots appear, and a piece of creation is healed.”\*

Live – at least this day, these next few moments – with miraculous expectation.

\* Robert A. Raines, in *The Ridgeleaf*, occasional newsletter from Kirkridge Retreat Center, April 1986, #158.