Homily: 11th Sunday Ordinary Time (yr. B, 2024)

I have two stories today. The first would probably be more appropriate for Mother’s Day, but I’m afraid, I’d forget it for new year; and since it’s such a great example of something that started like a mustard seed, I couldn’t pass it up. I hope all of you fathers understand. This first one is a story that appeared on CBS News and in The Washington Post this past April...... Emouree Johnson’s Mother, Karli died last March at the age of twenty-nine. She was a single mom - and Emouree’s everything. At Easter, the seven year old visited the cemetery with her grandmother for the first time since her Mom’s funeral. Emouree couldn’t understand why every other grave had a giant granite headstone, while her mother’s grave was identified with only a small metal marker. Her grandmother explained that they couldn’t afford the five hundred dollars for a headstone right now, but would save for one. Emouree didn’t like the fact that her mother was being left out and wanted to help. So Emouree did the only thing she could think of to raise money: she opened a lemonade stand. When she opened the stand in her Scottsboro, Alabama, neighborhood, Emouree made no mention of her cause. But word soon got out - and suddenly everyone in Scottsboro was thirsty for lemonade. With the help of her family’s social media postings, hundreds of people visited the stand where Emouree’s lemonade sold for one dollar a cup - but people often paid more. One customer included a three hundred dollar tip. Open for five days during Easter week, Emouree’s lemonade stand took in more than fifteen thousand dollars - which will now go into a savings account for Emouree’s future because a monument company is donating the headstone......... We could very well say that Emouree squeezed out hope from the lemons life handed to her.......... Lemonade Faith - a form of mustard seed Faith if you will - is centered in the conviction that in the smallest acts of compassion and generosity we can transform the most barren stretches of our lives into gardens of hope. Emouree Johnson took the mustard seeds she had - lemonade - and not only realized her goal, but awakened the spirit of generosity and compassion within her community............ At times, we may have little or no expectation of a harvest; nurturing what we have planted may very well be a very frustrating and seemingly futile undertaking. But JESUS calls us to wait patiently - To embrace the Faith of the Gospel farmer and the hope of the mustard seed - To be willing to plant whatever seeds of Gospel compassion and mercy we possess, wherever, whenever and however we can, trusting that it will, in some way, result in the harvest of building GOD’S Kingdom. According to the Spiritual writer; Jay Comier; it’s all that quote “boring work” that makes a harvest possible - and having the Faith; that all that dedicated boring effort will be worth the investment of time and resources. May we always embrace the Hope of Faith. GOD Sees all, even our simplest offerings of behind the scenes acts of charity; for even in those we imitate the spirit of generous servanthood the Gospel JESUS calls us too...... The second story comes from the book; My Grandfather’s Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge and Belonging, by Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen. In the book, Dr. Rachel recounts the many unusual gifts she received from her beloved grandfather, an Orthodox rabbi and scholar. In one, her grandfather had given her a paper cup when she was four. She expected to find something special inside; but to her shock and dismay, it was filled with dirt. Her grandfather then took her little teapot from her doll’s tea set and lead Rachel to the kitchen and proceeded to fill the teapot with water. He put the little cup filled with dirt in her room and handed her the teapot. If you promise to put some water in this cup every day, something may happen, he told her. This made little sense to the four year old, but Rachel promised. Every day; he repeated. At first, Rachel didn’t mind pouring water into the cup, but as the days went on and nothing happened, it became harder and harder for the little girl to remember her promise. After a week, she asked her grandfather if it was time to stop yet. Grandfather shook his head. Every day; he repeated. The second week it became even harder, but Grandfather held her to her promise. Every day; he kept repeating. Surprisingly, the four year old Rachel never missed a single day of watering. Then, one morning after three weeks, there were two little green leaves in the cup that had not been there the night before. Little Rachel was astonished. She couldn’t wait to tell her grandfather, certain that he would be as surprised as she was. But, of course, he wasn’t. Carefully he explained to his young granddaughter that life is everywhere; hidden in the most ordinary and unlikely places. Rachel was delighted with her discovery. And all it needs is water Grandpa? Gently, he touched her on the top of her head. No, dear Rachel, he replied; all it needs is your Faithfulness...... This true story brings out another definition for Faith. Faith is the ability to see the potential in the smallest of things and the courage and perseverance to unlock that potential....Faith is the ability to see the potential in the smallest of things and the courage and perseverance to unlock that potential... Because of the RESURRECTION of CHRIST we are assured that our dreams of peace, community, justice and unity will ultimately be realized. But that promise begins first of all, in the everyday acts of compassion and service of each one of us. The mustard seed - that tiny speck containing the chemical energy to create the great plant - is a natural parable for the greatness that GOD raises up from small beginnings. Those of you who have planted even the smallest garden know it’s all a matter of hard work and patient faith. All you can do is plant your seeds and nurture them with water and a lot of weed pulling. GOD’S unseen hand in creation transforms the tiny seeds, whatever they are, into a great harvest. Scholars tell us that this parable of the man scattering seed on the land is a call from JESUS to patience, hope, and even readiness for the harvest to come. Scholars also tell us that JESUS may have been directing this parable to the Zealots, a Jewish sect that desired to free Israel from Roman oppression through military means. Most of them were not very patient, employing murder and insurrection to destabilize the Roman government. The Zealots saw the Messiah as a Military General who would be Victorious in chasing the Romans out. JESUS, however, having no desire to resort to violence, is calling them to see their identity as GOD’S people not in terms of political power or military victory, but through Faith and Trust in GOD. Having Faith and Trust in GOD, JESUS is calling us to embrace the Faith of the man scattering seed on the land; to plant seeds of peace, reconciliation, justice and unity, again, wherever, whenever and however we can, in the certain knowledge that, in GOD’S good time, our plantings will result in the harvest of the Kingdom of GOD. JESUS entrusts to us, HIS Disciples, the work of making the Reign of GOD a reality in our own time and place with patient but determined mustard seed Faith: the conviction that, from the smallest and humblest acts of justice, compassion, and service, the Kingdom of GOD will take root and grow.