

Sermon for October 2, 2022
PROPER 22, YEAR C
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Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico

[Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4](#)

[Psalm 37:1-10](#)

[2 Timothy 1:1-14](#)

[Luke 17:5-10](#)

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, o Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

Friday morning when I was driving to work in northeast Albuquerque, I saw something that took me back 50 years. This year is the 50th anniversary of the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, and in celebration, a reenactment of that first fiesta 50 years ago was held on Friday in the south parking lot of Coronado Shopping Center. As I drove past Coronado, I saw thirteen balloons being launched from the exact site where 13 balloons launched 50 years ago. In fact, one of the original balloons and three of the original pilots were in attendance! I was at that first fiesta – a rally, actually – in 1972, and boy, what a long way we have come!

In the first few years of the fiesta, the balloons inflated and launched mid-morning, which by today's standard is much too late in the day if the pilots hope to get any lift and catch the wind currents known as the Albuquerque Box. In early days, there were flying competitions such as the coyote and roadrunner race, where one balloon, the Roadrunner, would launch, and other balloons (the Coyotes) would then launch a few minutes later. Whoever could land closest to the Roadrunner balloon would win the flying competition. There were altitude competitions to see which pilot could fly the highest, and probably the best known competition, the key grab, required immense skill as pilots attempted to maneuver their balloons beside a tall pole on which were placed the keys to a new vehicle. If you could grab the keys, the car was yours!

In the early days, the fiesta was focused on the pilots and their skill. These pilots comprised a small and tight-knit community, and they competed against each other for prizes and for bragging rights. And they realized that Albuquerque happened to have everything that was needed for the perfect ballooning experience: cool temperatures, varying wind conditions creating the Albuquerque Box, and dedicated members of the community who were anxious to volunteer on chase crews. And the pilots, as it turned out had a desire to share what they loved with the surrounding community, allowing residents of Albuquerque to experience the beauty and tranquility of balloons floating effortlessly above the city.

We have gone from 13 balloons in a shopping center parking lot to the nearly 800 balloons representing more than 20 countries that are launching in waves this year from the 360-acre Balloon Fiesta Park. Hotel rooms are booked more than a year in advance, the several hundred RV spots in and around the balloon park are filled a week before the fiesta begins, and

the hundreds of thousands of visitors to the state pump millions of dollars into the economy during the nine-day event each year. The pilots no longer have the competitions that they previously did, however; this is not what it's about now. It is about coming together in friendship and fellowship to offer not only the city of Albuquerque but visitors from around the globe an experience that they will never forget.

Several hundred pilots volunteer to visit elementary schools around Albuquerque just prior to the start of the fiesta to inflate their balloons and allow the children and their parents to have a hands-on experience of seeing how a balloon is inflated and how it flies. I have known a number of balloon pilots over the years, and they all fell in love with the art of flying at a young age. They started as co-pilots, quickly learning that they had to relinquish control and allow the balloon to carry them.

While they are all launched from the same location during the fiesta, those 800 balloons catch different air currents and are carried in many different directions, and nobody knows where they will ultimately land. But this is the beauty of it. The pilots leave the ground in gigantic vessels that cannot be steered or stopped. The only thing they can control is the amount of hot air that is introduced into or released from the envelope of the balloon. A propane burner is the only thing that they need in order to soar above the city, and once a pilot fires their burner and lifts off, they relinquish control and are simply along for the ride. They don't know where they will land or whom they will meet when they land, but their desire to offer awe-inspiring beauty and serenity in a small way to those on the ground below them carries them upward and onward to an unknown destination. They hope, however, that their chase crew will be able to locate them!

In our Gospel reading this morning, the disciples beg Jesus to increase their faith, and he responds by saying if you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you would be able to command trees to be uprooted and planted in the sea. In other words, you already have what you need, and this faith can grow exponentially if given the chance. The disciples are expecting Jesus to magically bestow upon them something that they do not already have. But he does not give them anything. He responds by telling them that even being faithful in very small ways can have a huge impact. He showed them that they in fact had everything they needed and that they had only to tap into it. But this meant that they had to relinquish their control and see where God would take them. They were all along for the ride, and I would venture to guess that all of them were very surprised by where they ended up!

All of us have faith within us, but this faith has to be cultivated and then shared. And as this faith is cultivated and grows, extraordinary things can happen. Look at the tremendous outreach efforts of small groups such as the Friars Minor ("little brothers"), and the Little Sisters of Charity. One commentator has said that, "Smallness is in many ways a gift. Small groups can take on tasks or living situations that are outside the scope of larger institutions. Small groups of concerned Christians can embrace social outcasts, showing the love of God in a particular place and time. The small mustard seeds of faith scattered throughout the world generally fall in places and situations where people are struggling to make sense of what it means to be human in the world."

Whether we realize it or not, you and I bless others and sow the tiny seeds of faith through our own actions and through our interactions with others. We might offer a kind word to the frazzled checker at the supermarket or lend a helping hand to our coworkers when they are overwhelmed with assignments and deadlines are looming. Perhaps we offer to babysit the neighbor's children so that she can take her ailing mother to a doctor's appointment. And these small things – these tiny seeds of the Kingdom of God – take root without us realizing it. The great spiritual writer Henri Nouwen speaks of sowing in faith. He says, "Our seeking to bless others – our attempts to do something of God's good to others – is serving in faith. It is doing what we can do in the expectation of the greater things that God alone can do."

To accomplish his purpose, Christ sends us forth with the mustard seeds of faith, and we sow these seeds as we live into the vows that we took or that were made for us at our baptism – the vows to proclaim the Good News of God in Christ, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to strive for justice and peace among all people. This coming Tuesday we will commemorate the life of St. Francis of Assisi. One of my favorite prayers is attributed to him and embodies what I believe it means to sow the seeds of the Kingdom of God and be an instrument of Christ. If you will, please take out your Prayer Books and turn to page 833. Please join me in praying this prayer:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

The 13 balloon pilots in a shopping center parking lot had no idea what would grow out of their small rally that day 50 years ago, but the world of hot air ballooning was forever changed by what they offered. May each of us go forth from here today bearing the mustard seeds of faith, and may we allow the Holy Spirit to carry us where it will. We don't know where we will end up, and we don't know whom we will encounter, but may those tiny seeds of faith that we carry with us take root and grow exponentially among all whom we meet along the way.

Amen