

“Poco A Poco: Little By Little”

- I. Introduction: Poco a poco. Early in our pilgrimage in Spain several of us met an elderly gentleman who was walking towards us on the path with his three dogs. He was friendly and warm. I asked if his dogs were male or female – my Spanish is very limited, but he understood and answered, then sat down on the stone wall by the path. He seemed interested in initiating a conversation, and what ensued was one of those remarkable interactions that transcends language and place. He somehow conveyed that he wanted to know our destination, and we told him Santiago. He then asked where we were stopping for the night, and we told him Portamarin, a city on the hill by a large river. In 1962 the old village of Portamarin was deliberately submerged by a dam. The Romanesque Church of San Juan was re-built stone by stone and now stands in the new village. One of us conveyed that the journey was tiring and long, and he responded thoughtfully “Poco a poco.” We all understood that he was saying “Little by little.” That’s how we’d get there, little by little, step by step. Peg and Susan turned to me and said “There’s a sermon in that.” And there is, so this morning’s sermon is entitled “Poco a poco.” The experience and the phrase became a reminder of how we would reach the destination of our pilgrimage, little by little, step by step. Peg asked him if she could take his picture, and we will put that picture on the website with this sermon.

- II. “Little by little” Jesus tells his disciples. We will walk together, and we will talk together, and we will take our own pilgrimage. While we do so I will teach you many things about my Father. I will use parables, stories that you understand and as you listen and I explain these stories, you will become more and more clear about what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. And the clearer you become, the more you will be able to bring the Kingdom to life right here and now. But be patient, your knowledge and understanding will usually grow little by little – poco a poco.

Today’s story, The Parable of the Weeds, is like the story of the Sower of Seeds in four different kinds of soil. Our Deacon Amy Morehous preached a fine sermon on this story last week. But today’s parable is about weeds – those pesky plants that sneak into our gardens, even inside the crevices of our sidewalks, and often grow up tall and healthy with no assistance from us. Today Jesus’ story is about those weeds. Here’s a brief synopsis: A farmer sowed wheat in his field, hoping for a productive harvest. Then while he was asleep his enemy planted weeds among the wheat. After a bit both the wheat and the weeds began to grow in the field, and they were all mixed together. Alarmed, the farmer’s hired help offered to go and pull up the weeds. But the owner

of the field said no. He told them that pulling up the weeds would damage the roots of the wheat plants. For now, he said, let them grow together. Let the plants grow little by little, poco a poco, until harvest time arrives, and then all will be set right.

- III. The deep wisdom of God is revealed in this story. First, I believe, that through this parable Jesus was teaching us that God is fully in charge of the world that God has created. And because this is true, we do not have to take matters into our own hands. We do not need to worry and come up with our own solutions to the complex problems we face. We are often tempted to move toward action and solutions ourselves, before giving God time to guide us. Those of us who are type A particularly tend to move forward to quick resolution. At the first sign of a weed, we type A folks want to yank it up and get rid of it. Trust me, says our God, I will instruct you to take action and burn the weeds when the time is right.

The point is not to be passive or inactive. Poco a poco does not mean that we refrain from our labor and problem-solving. What it does mean is that the actions we take, need to reflect God's ultimate wisdom, not our own limited understanding. Let me give you an example. One of the most important goals I believe we need to have at Ascension is to consistently generate the financial resources that will allow us to pay our bills, support the ministries that God calls us into, and to do so without borrowing. In April and May we began to experience a slowdown in revenue. It was unanticipated. I was tempted as I have done on previous occasions, to preach about our giving. But as I prayed and sought God's direction, I remembered what I learned from all of you in last year's home Eucharists – tell us, you had said, what's happening, and we will respond. So we have seen to it that you have been kept abreast of our financial situation in the monthly newsletters and informed by our Sr. Warden about the need to be consistent in our giving. You have responded well, and it is my prayer that you will continue to respond consistently in this generous way. God is leading us as a spiritual community to a place of faithful giving and spiritual health. And God knows that how we give of our first fruits, reflects our relationship with Him and our appreciation of his blessings to us.

- IV. I believe that God's wisdom is revealed to us in a second way in today's parable. Let me be the judge, says God, of when it's time to pull the weeds and burn them up. Left to our own devices, we humans slip mighty quickly into judgment and reaction. Sometimes our judgments seem so clear to us – a weed is a weed is a weed – that we have trouble allowing for God's grace to intervene in the situation. If someone would have had to make a judgment about whether I was a weed or a desirous plant in some of my earlier years, I could very well have wound up on the weed pile. But like the

field of wheat and weeds, God gave me time, God gave me wise and loving people in my life, and God gave me a church, the Episcopal Church, that has encouraged me to faithfully follow my own spiritual journey. My new-found church did not judge me . . . it loved me. God is good. God's grace is transformative, and I escaped the weed pile. I suspect have many others here this morning have escaped the weed pile as well.

There is a new book climbing its way up the best-seller lists entitled *The Shack* by William P. Young (2007). I commend this book to you, but will not compromise your enjoyment of it by revealing much about the story. What I will say is that in his surprising and deeply engaging contact with God, the leading character Mack learns that God's judgment is always muted and shaped by God's mercy and love for us. Yes, God expects us to change; yes, God gives us opportunity after opportunity to do so; but always God is reshaping us and reforming us with patience and creativity. Yet even as God does so for so many of us, it is little by little, poco a poco, always with the hope that as the process unfolds, we will respond to God's love for us in kind.

- V. Conclusion. We are blessed by the many ways God is revealed to us. This morning God is revealed in the baptism of Abbie Borth, two weeks ago in the baptism of Mike Hammontree. God is revealed to us in ways that are life changing, but we need to be ready to catch the glimpse of God's presence. If we let go of the worry, the need to be in charge, and the tendency to rush quickly to judge ourselves and others, there will be more space for God to reveal God's self to us. Where will you see and hear God this morning Will it be in the music, in the Word, in the person next to you, in the children who will soon surround the font, in the beauty of this place? And will you see and hear God in the thoughts you have, the feelings that well up inside of you as you worship, and in the movement of your soul? I hope so and pray so – and I hope you know that in all of these experiences with God, God is loving and patient. God does not expect us to work everything out quickly, to understand it all, or to make the changes we need to make all at once – God just wants us to know that God loves us and that we are on our life journey together. One step at a time, God and us, poco a poco. And God's wisdom will guide us. *Amen.*