

This is how it is with the kingdom of God. Mark 4:26

When I was in the prime of my life I had little interest in my family history. I had too much on my mind about here and now and week after week. Only later as life slowed down did I begin to wonder where I came from, how widespread was my extended family, how many of the people I passed on the street were possibly cousins after well over a century and a half of my family's residence in southeastern Pennsylvania.

But I was running out of resources. For instance, my granduncle Alf seemed the only surviving namesake direct from my father's family whose memory I might glean . . . but when I asked him what he knew of his parents and grandparents and others stretching back to Ireland before 1840, he said abruptly: *I don't worry about all that; I am my own ancestor*. His memory of what happened before him was deliberately blank. Fortunately he did have some first cousins, two unmarried sisters who remembered and recorded much for me – so at last I felt the comfort of knowing my roots, some sense of belonging to generations and places long gone. I had a history.

My interest in my roots turned out not to be a solitary one. Thanks to Alex Haley's documentary drama titled *Roots* back in the 1970's, which tracked his African heritage back to pre-slavery days on another continent, many people of other backgrounds began to show interest in their ancestors . . . until today a company like Ancestry.com is making a profit tracing the *dna* of millions (?) of clients . . . revealing surprises about their origins, links to even famous or notorious relatives of their past.

We refer to such research as genealogy, but isn't it interesting how often we persist in calling such research: *tracing one's roots, tracing one's family tree*. Why roots? Why family tree? I don't have roots; I'm footloose and fancy-free. I'm not anchored to the ground on which I stand. Or am I wrong about that? Many wise people say our problem today is that we think we are somehow independent of the nature around us, that we stand outside the world we live in – to master it. What was it the Greek mathematician Archimedes once said? *Give me a place to stand on, and I will move the Earth*. We are in this world but not of it, strangers to rocks and springs and woodlands and stars, even the sun itself.

Not so the Bible! Our biblical storytellers long ago imagined we are of the *very dust of the earth become moist and moldable*. We are soil that has become alive, wide ranging. In today's first reading God speaks of his people as a majestic cedar tree branching out, housing every kind of bird. In today's Gospel reading we are compared to seedlings subject to influences of which we are unaware . . . even while we are asleep. We are compared to the mustard seed, of no account and yet somehow so full of life beyond our modest imaginations – sprouting, branching out every time we gain a new insight, perform a generous deed.

We are not so unattached to our environment as we think. God is as much if not more operative upon us quietly as if from underground, from beneath our attention span than from what we see and hear and meet in the daylight hours of our lives. We are not just a part of an *organized* world but of an *organism* larger, deeper than we realize. Often unconsciously (beneath our ken) our lives, our roots work their way down to those well springs of which Jesus once spoke, whence there appear wisdom, virtue - *first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear* until as Shakespeare says: *Ripeness is all!*