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## **A Parable and Three Dreams**

By the Rev. Salying Wong

To what shall I compare the kingdom of God?

Jesus 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."

What could the seed really be? What could the harvest really be? Does the person dream when she goes to sleep? Is the dream like a seed? Today, I have three dreams. I wonder, how are they like today's parable from the Gospel of Mark?

When my mother was a young woman, growing up in Mao's China, growing up in the 60's and farming rice in the Sun Wu, she would have to do early morning chores. Every day, she would have to fetch water, slipping around the wet ground toward the gape that was the well. Everyday she would have to climb the bamboo mountains and compete with the other villagers scouring for kindling to make fire. That was her least favorite chore, climbing straight up the hill, with a bamboo basket strapped on her back, bending and picking dead wood and tossing it behind her. It was demanding work. She had a bad heart from rheumatic fever; she struggled for breath while the other young people out paced her her up the mountain. She could only salvage what others missed. One night, she had a dream that she went to the bamboo mountains and there was kindling everywhere. Everywhere, enough for everyone. She didn't have to climb the mountain. She was filled with joy at the harvest. When she woke, she shook her head, "Now wouldn't that be something. All the kindling she would ever want and she wouldn't have to work for it."

When my father was a young man, he and his friend went fishing for white eel. This, again, was in Mao's China and everyone was always trying to find something to eat. They had heard that the trick was to bait eel with ground peanuts. There was a peanut oil press in our village. When we needed oil, we would take the peanuts we'd grown and take it there. We would watch the miracle of oil draining from peanuts as the press squeezed out the oil. So, my dad and his friend went to the oil press and asked if they could have some of the leftover peanut pulp. Then they took it to the pond nearby where they heard there was eel. They scattered the pulp into the pond. They sat down and waited and waited. After spending the whole day waiting, my dad's friend concluded that it was a fairytale that eel like to eat peanut pulp. He went away, disgusted by the waste of a day. But my dad stayed. He had never fished for eel before, but he had nothing else to do. So, as the night descended, he settled a rock underneath his head and went to sleep.

In the morning, he woke and all around him, he was surrounded by beached white eels. And immediately, he threw each one into his two baskets, strapped the pole between them and carried them to market. That night he and his friend ate till they were full for the first time since they could remember.

I have memories of life in the village, of the hunger and the longing. Even though my fridge always has food, even though I can turn on the tap to get water, twist a knob to get gas for fire, the hunger and longing is deep within me. Until a few years ago, I had a recurring dream. In the dream, I was always in a garden. I didn't know to whom it belonged. It was full of fruit trees, enormous mangos, jackfruit, fruit from realms unknown. But whomever it was that owned the garden did not harvest and all the fruit was overripe. I would ache with frustration at the waste; I would struggle with desire to take the fruit. Was it right to take it? I would wake with longing.

I no longer have this dream. When I lost my marriage, I thought I'd lost everything. I could only see my life as a barren desert. Bishop Mary asked me, "When are you going to tell your congregation?" I said, "Maybe never." Bishop Mary said,

“Sallying, let them love you.” And I did. And then I began to experiment. I began to receive love from whomever would love me, no matter how quirky its form. I realized love was everywhere, but it came like treasure hidden in a field, like a diamond in the rough, like yeast in the dough, like a mustard seed. It was always there for the taking and abundantly. But it must be taken in the form that it is given. To receive love is to accept reality as it is, not as I would have it. If I love is only received as I would have it, even that would be taken from me.

I never had that dream again. I realized, that garden was for me. The fruit had always been for me. I did not have to ask for permission or deserve it to eat my heart out. The harvest of love had been there for me all along.

The sickle the person uses to harvest in Jesus’ parable is a symbol of the final judgment. This is what I believe the final judgment will be like. I will not be asked what good I did. I will be asked if I perceived the abundant love around me and if I said yes to it. I will be asked if I tried to love even in my own brokenness rather than replace the vulnerability of love with the performance of good works and heroics. For the kingdom of God is pure love and it destroys the ego. Will I enter when the invitation comes to walk into pure love?

To what shall I compare the Kingdom of God? The seed that is scattered, what can it be for you? Do you know how to name these seeds of longing? What mystery of your desire does God coax into fullness of being? Would you recognize the harvest when it comes? Let them who have eyes see and those who have ears hear.