

My friend Elsie just wanted to be a normal wife and mother. She married late in life, and when her first child was born, she rejoiced that now her life was complete. Then the doctor gave her news she didn't want to hear: Her precious, perfect baby was born with Down's Syndrome. Now, Elsie knew her child was still wonderful; she knew that other mothers of such babies grew to heroic stature: They were strong, far-sighted, extraordinarily loving women. She knew that, but Elsie just wanted to be a normal wife and mother. She didn't know if she could ever be extraordinary.

Elsie's story is one we want to be happy. We want her to have hope that she can handle life anew. Still, once in a while life troubles us, and even though we know about heroes, we don't know if we can become like them.

The parables we hear today are parables of hope. Jesus spoke about growth to his small group of followers. These parables speak of the growth of the Church like the growth of grain, or the full flowering of a mustard plant.

I don't think the disciples could have fully understood these parables when they heard them. Jesus loved the kingdom, it was his pet project, the reason he came. He knew the growth of the kingdom would mean persecution for his disciples, travel, evangelization, and death. They could not have known that. But he left these parables behind as one drops corn in the forest, so they could find their way out of the dark.

The technique Jesus uses is hope. It takes time for the grain to grow; it grows while the farmer sleeps. But it does grow. There's hope.

What helps create hope? Hearing that success is possible, hearing that someone or something else suffered and grew.

I believe that providing hope is a function of the Church. Parishioners of ours lost a 30-year old son in a hiking accident last week in Alaska. Nobody wants to face tragedy like that, and yet their faith gave them hope. When Ruby McEntire's restaurant burned down this spring she was ready to call it quits, but her customers opened her again this week, and Ruby said she'd cook as long as the Lord wanted her to. These parables about seed plant seed in us so that if tragedy strikes, we may still have hope.

There is a happy ending to Elsie's story. She became the outstanding mother she never thought she could be. But she couldn't have done it without friends and family who put hope in her heart. It is hope which makes the mustard seed grow.