

When a seed falls from a tree, it has two options. It can depose on the rocks and ground and perhaps get eaten by birds, or it can be buried in the earth, where it will germinate, causing it to break out of its outer shell and begin its process of becoming a new plant.

Its growth will include roots and eventually a stalk and leaves. It may even become a big tree that produces food for other creatures to eat and branches for birds to sit in. The seed will have come a long way since its beginning as a solitary seedling to a big life-producing tree that is contributing to the whole ecosystem and may even live for hundreds of years.

As Jesus says in our parable this morning, "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit."

We go through similar stages in our human development, not in literal deaths, but in symbolic deaths as we keep outgrowing one stage for another. From infants to toddlers to children to youth to adults, we are like a seed outgrowing our shells to allow room for something new. We move from milk to solid food, from crawling to walking, from learning to doing. And in each stage of growth, our lives become bigger. We move from being babies, only aware of our caregivers, to realizing we have a family and friends and a neighborhood and a school, and eventually we realize there is a whole big world and even a universe that we are a part of.

Like the seed, we come a long way from our beginnings. We go from only identifying with our individual selves to seeing how we are interconnected to all of creation. Our worldview becomes bigger to seeing, and our capacity to hold this new reality becomes bigger, too. So, it would only make sense that this pattern is also true of our spiritual development. We each have a seed of divinity planted inside of us. This is where God's presence dwells and connects us to eternity. Of course, we want our seeds to grow and thrive and to not stay dormant inside of us, and yet it can be hard to choose this new growth.

Growing spiritually requires us to let go of what we think we know, to let go of what brings us security, to let go of who we think we are. To let go. And letting go of what keeps us safe in this world can feel like being buried in the dark soil and dying, but it is only in leaving behind our attachments to what is passing and only of this world that we can break out of the shells we've created around ourselves and enter into God's bigger, more authentic reality.

In God's reality, we realize the dark soil or what felt like a death is actually a place of transformation, because when we no longer hold so tightly to temporary things like our jobs, our titles, our money, our relationships, even our beliefs, opinions, and judgments, we can instead be rooted in what is eternal.

Many spiritual traditions call this process transcending the ego or an ego death. And as the word death implies, moving beyond our limited perception of reality and our sense of self is not easy and is likely painful, but as Jesus shows us through his death and resurrection, it is the only way to attain eternal life because, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit."

And this is what is happening in our baptisms. In baptism, you choose to not let the seed of your inner divinity or the divinity in your baby or child remain dormant or forgotten, but instead, you bury this seed in the rich soil that is God, so that the outer shell of your temporary existence can crack open and your spirit can take root and grow and become part of something bigger than your solitary self, that will become a life-giving offering to the whole of creation. In other words, you choose to let your small reality die so that you can be reborn into the fullness of God's true reality.

In our baptismal covenant, we prayed, "Thank you, father for the water of baptism. In it, we are buried with Christ in his death. By it, we share in his resurrection. Through it, we are reborn by the Holy Spirit." So in baptism, you are letting go of life as you know it, and your own solitary identity, in order to enter into Christ's eternal life, reborn by

God's spirit, which is connecting us all and making us a blessing to one another.

Amen.

And the sacrament of baptism empowers you with the grace to courageously leave behind all that you have outgrown, all the limiting ways you have perceived the world and yourself in relation to it, and to now live into your new life in God, which is limitless. You are going from a small seed in a protective shell to a big tree that is part of something so much more expansive.

And today as the Church, the gathered body of Christ, we have reaffirmed our baptismal covenants, acknowledging that this process of transformation isn't a one-time event, but something that happens continuously throughout our lives. We are continuously dying to our small, solitary selves and being resurrected as more authentic God-shaped people that are a source of God's love to one another and to all of creation.

So, as we celebrate these new baptisms and recommit to our baptismal vows, I invite you to consider where you are on this transformational journey. Maybe you haven't felt a real connection to God's presence inside of you and you're ready to choose to wake up what is dormant and to begin your journey of growing spiritually. Maybe you're in a time of darkness where things are changing inside of you, and while painful and scary, it is a transition leading to new growth. Maybe you're outgrowing your shell that you've built around yourself to stay safe and secure, and you're now ready to let go of these attachments so you can enjoy a bigger, more authentic life in God. Maybe you are in a time of life when you are enjoying our interconnectedness and giving back to your community.

Wherever you are is exactly where you need to be and exactly where God is meeting you. So may we each have the courage to fall into God and let our small solitary selves and realities die, so that we can be reborn in the spirit and made part of something more expansive and life-giving than we could ever imagine or ever create on our own.