

Parable of the Seed

(Mark 4:26 – 34)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Passage: Mark 8: 31 – 38

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A question I have sometimes pondered is this: “Does preaching do any good?” When I look at how many lives are NOT changed based on what I’ve heard preached, I can all-too-easily conclude that sermons are a waste of time. What do you think?

But the real question isn’t what we may think, but what Jesus thinks. In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus says, “***That’s not your concern!***” For He says, “***The Kingdom of God sprouts and grows on its own***” (Mark 4:28).

Yes, Jesus in His usual style puts us all in our place, especially this Susan and I who want to see God’s Kingdom grow in the way we want to see it grow! That’s because I, like every Christian, also have a sinful nature that wants to manage God. I want God’s Kingdom to sprout and grow in my own way, time, and choosing. But Jesus simply says that God’s kingdom “***produces by itself.***”

So, how does God’s Kingdom sprout and grow? It happens in its own way. Jesus says: “***The Kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, although he doesn’t know how. All by itself the soil produces a crop – first the stalk, then the head, and then the full head of grain.***”

Back in Jesus’ day, when it was time to plant, the farmer went out and sowed the seed by hand. He walked through the fields with his seed bag tied around his waist, and he would scatter the seed to the wind.

But before Jesus told the parable in today’s Gospel reading, He told, “***The Parable of the Sower and the Seed.***” In that parable, Jesus told how His Word goes out into the world, and He used seeds and soil to explain it. The scattered seed falls on different soils. Some fall on hardened earth, where the birds come and snatch up the seeds. Some fall on rocky soil, where the seed sprouts, but because the plants have no root, they quickly die. Some fall on the weed-infested ground, which chokes out the germinated seed.

But also remember there's another soil, a soil that produces a plentiful crop. Jesus talked about what happens when the Word falls on the good ground. It yields a large harvest. Jesus then gets to today's parable.

Jesus said, "***The Kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed on the ground.***" Did you notice the Sower isn't anxious when it comes to sowing the seed? He doesn't test the soil. He doesn't send off soil samples to some lab, trying to find out how receptive the soil will be or its potential yield. He simply takes the seed and scatters it. He doesn't even worry about where the seed will land.

The seed is the Word, who is Jesus, the Word made Flesh. The soil is the hearts of people. Now we get a picture of how God manages His kingdom in the world. He scatters the Word of Christ, not worrying if it lands on productive soil, rocks, weeds, or hard pavement. And then the Word, Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, creates faith when and where He wills.

Imagine a congregation if it took this parable seriously, of how the seed grows. Imagine St John's Lutheran Church. If we took this parable seriously, we would sow the Word of Christ recklessly, without concern for where it lands. We would tell others of Jesus, not worrying who hears it, if they are "ready" to hear it, or how they will respond. We would simply sow the seed of Christ's Word.

So, why doesn't that happen? One reason is fear. You and I fear that others may reject us and make fun of us. You fear that you may not know enough. You fear that you may not know how to answer a question someone might have. So we quietly hide in our little Christian corner, skulking in silence.

Another reason we don't sow the seed of Jesus is that we doubt Him. We doubt that Jesus will do what He says He will do. The Apostle Paul and Pastors Silas and Timothy wrote: "***God chose you as first fruits to be saved... He called you to this through our Gospel...***" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). In 1 Corinthians 3:6, Paul wrote, "***I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God caused the growth.***" Notice who is doing the verbs when it comes to believing and growing in the faith. God is! But, based on our experience, we often doubt that; so, instead, we act from our unbelief.

And what happens when you couple fear with unbelief? You get programs and ways of changing Christ's Church that are designed to make a congregation grow. But here's where we go wrong. No program can replace what God tells us to do—to sow the seed of the Word!

I suppose we can have all the best programs in our congregation – and maybe even have a sizable response. But it won't be God's doing, but our own. For the seed of the Word sprouts, grows, and produces fruit when it is scattered, when Christ is preached, proclaimed, and spoken.

When the pastor preaches Jesus into the ear and hearts of his listeners, he scatters the seed of the Word. You also scatter the seed when you bring Jesus to someone through what you say. You scatter the seed when you tell someone else about the hope that is in you. You scatter the seed when you point someone to baptism, to the Supper of Jesus' Body and Blood, and to the forgiveness of sins.

So, how does the Word work? Jesus says it produces all by itself. ***"[The Sower] sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, although he doesn't know how."*** You just sow the seed. The Kingdom produces by itself, in God's own way and time. Jesus says, ***"All by itself the soil produces a crop—first the stalk, then the head, and then the full head of grain."***

But when we look around, we don't see the growth we expect. It looks as if the Word of God isn't changing people's lives. To that Jesus says, ***"That's not your concern. Don't let what you see replace your walk of faith. The Kingdom of God will sprout and grow according to my timetable."*** So, what does that mean? It means that we do what God has given us to do – but we leave the results to God. That would be a horrible business model, but it's the right one for Christ's Church.

Jesus says, ***"How can we picture the Kingdom of God, or what parable can we use to describe it? Consider a mustard seed. When scattered on the ground, it's the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes larger than all the garden plants. It produces such large branches that even the birds in the sky can nest in its shade."***

Who would have thought that after Jesus was executed on the cross that a church of 120 people would spread and grow? Yet, the Church did exactly that! The Church grew as pastors and laypeople both proclaimed Jesus to others in their vocations where God had placed them to serve. Like a mustard seed, the kingdom always starts out small.

So, you tell others of Jesus. You invite them to Church. You make sure your pastor is sowing the real seed of the Word, not what you may simply want to hear. You seek out Rhonda and ask her how you can assist in the confirmation class, that Rhonda is facilitating with Pastor Ernie, Graham and John. Yes, the seed is sown, and the Kingdom grows. You and I sow the seed – but the results are in God's hands! Again, you and I sow the seed – but the results are in God's hands!

But also know this: For a plant to grow, the seed must die. For if the seed doesn't die, then a plant won't grow from the remains of the seed. In John's Gospel, Jesus said, ***"I assure you: Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it produces a large crop"*** (John 12:24).

Jesus was pointing to His own death. For He is the promised Seed of Abraham, the Seed through whom all nations would be blessed. He had to die and be buried like seed in the ground. If Jesus hadn't died, there would be no fruit, no forgiveness, no life, and no salvation.

The seed must die to fulfill its purpose. You also need to die. Every day, living in your baptism, the implanted Word is to have its way with you. You die to sin and self, so you may rise to new life in Jesus. Dying and rising are the way of the seed; they are the way of Christ and His Kingdom. You not only scatter the seed, you are also a seed that dies to live.

You and I may ask, "Does it do any good to scatter the seed?" Jesus answers, "**Yes, but leave the results to me.**" Your seed bags are full of the good Word of Jesus Himself. So scatter that Word. Scatter it fearlessly and recklessly. And know the seed will grow and produce a crop in God's own way and time, all by itself, just as it has in you.. **Amen.**

May the peace of God, which passes all human understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon Read by Phillip Edwards 13 June 2021

REFERENCE

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