

June 13, 2021
Third Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Mark 4:26-34

GROWING IN GOD’S KINGDOM.

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

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Mark the 4th chapter which you heard read earlier.

In our Gospel text, Jesus tells His disciples two parables to describe the Kingdom of God. Holy Scripture speaks of the *Kingdom of God* and the *Kingdom of Heaven* in a variety of ways. First, it’s a place outside time and space where God rules and sustains the universe and everything in it both big and small. It’s also the place where, on the Last Day, all who have died in Christ Jesus will be *bodily* raised to new life to dwell before the Lamb of God on His throne for all eternity. (cf: Revelation 7:9)

But most often, when the Bible refers to the Kingdom of God, it’s not speaking primarily of a place, but of a divine action. Where there is a kingdom, there is usually a king. God’s Kingdom is the King of creation’s divine action of taking on the flesh of man to reign and perform His kingly duties through His preaching, mighty works, suffering, death, and resurrection to restore His fallen creation. (cf: Gibbs, Matthew 1:1–11:1, Concordia Commentary, 49-50) And because Christ has begun His kingly duties here on earth, all who believe and trust in Him for salvation are part of His Kingdom.

In the first parable, the man doing the sowing is Jesus. The seed is the Word of God. The ground in which the seed grows are those who live under God’s reign and rule. After the man scatters the seed on the ground, he sleeps and rises, day and night. And that’s all. He can do doing more, because man cannot make the seed grow. You can try it. Go out to your garden and plant some seeds, then talk and preach to the seed. Encourage it to sprout and grow and produce a crop and see how that works for you. The truth is, you and I have *zero* power to make a seed sprout and grow, let alone produce a crop.

Jesus says:

“The earth produces by itself...” (Mark 4:28)

This does not mean that the earth itself produces life, but when others living within the Kingdom sow the seed which is God’s Word, the Word produces life. Mankind doesn’t understand how.

The seed sprouts and grows on its own and in stages:

“... first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.” (Mark 4:28)

And when the ripening reaches completion, it's time for the harvest.

The parable illustrates God's timing. The point of the parable is that God's kingdom grows mysteriously, at its own pace, through the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, creating, strengthening, and sustaining faith until it's brought to maturity on the day God takes you home to Himself in glory.

God's Kingdom remains just as active among us today. The Kingdom of God is here. Jesus is just as active among us, performing His kingly duties, as He was during His earthly ministry. He works through His Means of Grace, His Word and Sacraments, to forgive, renew, and to give life and salvation to all who believe. He sowed the seed of faith in your heart in the waters of Baptism or in the preaching of the Gospel. By remaining in Jesus, that is, being where He promises to come to you in Word and Sacrament, He continually forgives, renews, and gives you life.

It's all part of Jesus' kingly divine activity, working through His means, feeding and watering and nurturing that seed of faith, so that faith continually sprouts and grows and grows and grows toward maturity. He comes to you in the daily remembrance of your Baptism and washes away your sin. He feeds you His body and blood for forgiveness and your salvation. The Kingdom of God is here, reigning in truth and grace through the ministry of His Church, growing the Kingdom mysteriously, at its own pace, through the power of the Word.

And yet, to the naked eye, this Kingdom of God doesn't look like much. That's where the second parable comes in. The first parable focuses on the timing of the growth of the Kingdom. The second has to do with the extent of the growth. Jesus says the Kingdom of God:

"³¹ ... is like a grain of mustard seed... the smallest of all the seeds on earth."

(Mark 4:31–32)

Both the timing of the growth and extent of the growth are offensive to us 21st century Christians. The devil has finely tuned us into the American goal driven instant gratification lifestyle. You desire fast and big results. You want worship be flashy and entertaining in hopes that your unbelieving family and friends would attend worship and come to faith. You want the pop music, smoke machines, and the lights that the big-box church use, believing that those things will pack the pews.

The Divine Service seems like something so insignificant, unimpressive, and incapable of doing anything great. The Absolution sounds like just a bunch of words. The water in Baptism is ordinary tap water. The bread in Communion is bland, mass produced unleavened bread. And the wine comes from Walmart. And the preacher is just an ordinary guy droning on every week about the same thing: [sarcasm on→] *"Blah blah blah, Jesus does this. And: "Blah blah blah, Jesus does that."* [←sarcasm off] The old Adam sees this Kingdom of God as woefully short of accomplishing God's desire of getting people saved and coming to the knowledge of the truth. (cf: 1 Timothy 2:4) Let's face it. The liturgy is certainly not as exciting as a live band and a hipster pastor preaching on seven steps to living a better life.

These are the times that some Christians impatiently give up on the divine action of God and His Word and invent culturally relevant, cozy, and entertaining ways to worship. They dress up the Gospel by falsely claiming that God is going to provide your every worldly desire, even though it goes against His will. They water down the Law, making it sound as if God is indifferent to sin, and even censor the blood and gore of Christ crucified on Calvary's cross to make it less offensive. Manipulating God's Word might get more people in the pews, but it doesn't grow the Kingdom of God.

The Bible teaches that people cannot come to faith unless they hear the pure Gospel proclaimed. (cf: Romans 10:17) It's the Church's responsibility to train up disciples from all nations, baptizing and teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded. But that is what we, the church, are given to do: Baptize and to teach God's Word. That alone is our task.

Nowhere in Scripture does God command that you grow His Kingdom. St Peter writes that those who believe in Christ Jesus and have received His mercy are members of the priesthood of all believers. (cf: 1 Peter 2:9-10) As a member of the priesthood, you are to faithfully proclaim God's Word to family and friends and co-workers, while at the same time, remembering that in the Kingdom of God, His Word does the work. It's His divine action and His timing. You are merely sowing and watering and fertilizing the seed. God's Word gives the growth. (cf: 1 Corinthians 3:6)

The Christian life is about denying one's self and sharing the Good News of Christ crucified to save sinners, and to bear fruits of repentance, fruits of works and deeds and almsgiving, flowing from the love which Christ has loved you. To be sure, you **will** meet resistance. We live in a sinful world where the sinful man still has the free will to resist the generous love and mercy of the God's beloved Son. But as God's own child laboring in His harvest field, you can trust in God and His promises and not in your own efforts. You may never see the results of sharing God's Word, but that's not to say that God's Word returns to Him empty. (cf: Isaiah 55:11) God's Word is living and active. (cf: Hebrews 4:12) It is the power unto salvation (cf: Romans 1:16) and able to change the hearts of sinners, leading them to repentance and faith just as it forgives your sins and sustains your faith.

The reign and rule of Christ Jesus began as a tiny mustard seed, under the humblest circumstances, yet it grew into the greatest of all Kingdoms. God's own Son came down from heaven, not to be born in a palace, not into a famous and powerful family, and not growing to be strong and handsome – but was born in the tiny town of Bethlehem, to a lowly virgin, appearing to all, as the illegitimate son of a carpenter.

Who would have thought that this insignificant mustard seed of a King would win salvation for all mankind by His suffering and death on the cross? Who would have thought that the tiny mustard seed's frightened band of disciples would go on to hold fast to His teaching, spreading the Gospel, proclaiming Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, suffering all, even death, rather than deny their faith?

Today, this mustard seed has grown larger than any other plant in the garden so that birds of every feather can make nests in its shade, which is another analogy of the Kingdom of God. All

who are part of the Kingdom had their beginnings in the planting of the seed of the Word of God. That seed was fed and nurtured in Word and Sacrament, so that it sprouted and grew. After a lifetime of growth, when the ripening reaches completion, it's time for the harvest. And our God who planted the seed of His Word and began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the Last Day when He raises your body from the grave and ushers you into the Kingdom of God which has no end. Of that eternal Kingdom, St John writes that there will be:

“... a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:9)

Dear member of the Kingdom of God, our Lord has given you the precious seed of His Word. Lovingly sow the seed that our Lord lovingly sowed in you. Tell the good news of Jesus. Sow it with joy. Sow it free from anxiety and worry about success or failure because it doesn't depend upon you. God gives the growth. Invite your friends and neighbors to worship. Every Sunday morning, the seed of the Gospel of Jesus is sown in the liturgy, in the reading and proclamation of the Word, and in our hymnody. The people hear. In some, the seed sprouts in faith and they repent. And they are instantly added to the Kingdom of God, and will be numbered with the saints in glory and will live eternally with our King in His Kingdom forever.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.