

St Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Pentecost 4 – June 25<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009

### **Mark 4:26-34**

**He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”**

**Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.”**

**With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.**

Dear Children of God,

One thing that is fun to do with small children is to let them plant seeds – maybe bean seeds or other garden seeds or maybe just some sort of plant seeds. It isn't so much about how many beans you get or how large the plants grow, but it is fun to observe your kids as they watch and wait for those seeds to grow. Planting seeds is a big lesson in faith and patience. It is not uncommon on the same day or maybe a few days later to see the children running outside to see if their plant has grown, but we as adults know that it doesn't happen that fast. You have to explain to them that they need to have faith and patience that those seeds were going to take some time to grow. Unfortunately our children are much like us when it comes to faith and patience as many of us might pray to God, “Lord, grant me patience, but hurry.”

Faith and patience are not always the easiest thing to have is it? We live in a world that prides itself in instant results – I mean you shouldn't have to wait for anything. I think Heinz Ketchup is about the only thing we do wait for anymore. For instance, if you want to do some banking, just make a few clicks on your computer. If you want a quick meal, throw something in the microwave for a few seconds. If you're watching something on T.V. and don't want to sit and wait for the commercials, get TIVO, and skip them. We aren't very good at being patient because we never have to be – everything is a click on some sort of electronic device away.

Well, not quite everything. If you're going to plant a garden, you need to have faith and patience. And in our text for this morning Jesus said that there is something else that we need faith and patience for, and that is kingdom work. With a couple of parables he showed how sharing the Gospel with others is much like planting a garden He tells us:

**Sermon Text: Mark 4:26-34**

**Theme: Kingdom Work Is A Matter Of Faith!**

- 1. Faith that God's Word is working**
- 2. Faith that God's Church is growing**

#### **1. Faith that God's Word is working**

If you want a beautiful garden full of vegetables you have to plant the seeds, right? But then there really isn't all that much you can do is there? Oh, to keep your garden looking nice you could be out there weeding just about every day, but whether you do or not the vegetables will still grow. You could go out

and water whenever it gets real, real hot, but yet many people don't and the rain seems to still make their plants grow. My point is, you can keep yourself awfully busy gardening, but other than planting the seeds you're really not doing anything to make the seeds grow. That's out of our control. We really don't know how that happens.

So it is with the kingdom of God Jesus says. **“A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how”**. It doesn't matter what the man does, if he plants the seed, it's going to grow. Yes, the kingdom of God is going to grow if someone just plants the seed. Let's make it clear. God uses us as his children to plant the seed. Anytime we share the message of sin and grace with someone, we are planting the seed.

Now what is the kingdom of God first of all? Jesus, when replying to the Pharisees, says in Luke chapter, **“The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”** This kingdom then that we are referring to is Christ's rule in our hearts. It is none other than his rule in us by faith. So what we are talking about is how people become believers.

Well how do people become believers according to this parable? Well, someone must first plant the seed and that seed is obviously the Gospel message found in God's Word. We need to share Christ with people. We need to tell them that despite their many sins, God has had mercy on them and has forgiven them through the death of His own Son. And that death has earned them heaven. But then what must happen? What do we have to do after we share the Gospel message with someone, after we plant the seed if you will? We have to impress people with the perfect church building before that seed of faith will germinate, right? We have to offer programs for every age of people, don't we; otherwise that seed will never come out of the ground? Wrong!

Dear friends, we need only to do the same thing we try to tell our children after they planted the seeds. We need to be patient and trust that God is working in the hearts of the people who have heard God's Word. Kingdom work takes patience – patience to let God work. Through His Word God does it all. His Word, which can be planted in a person's heart through someone's witness, is the only thing that can cause faith to grow in their heart. There is nothing that you or I can do to speed up that process.

Like we said in the introduction with the children planting seeds. Kids often times will run out every day and even multiple times each day to see if their seeds are growing. How often aren't we just like that? We stand looking out the doors and windows here at church expecting to see an immediate change in someone. We may have had a wonderful conversation about our faith with somebody while out canvassing, or even at work, and we expect them to be in church the very next Sunday. And if they're not, we assume that our conversation had no impact – we think our witnessing was useless. But if you shared the Word with the person, then you planted the seed and you've done what you can. Whenever we share the Word God gives us a promise, a promise stated nowhere as good as it is in Isaiah 55:11, **“So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish the purpose for which I sent it.”** The power is in the Gospel. Don't think your witness had no effect if you shared that Gospel. God tells us it did.

But are we always going to see what we expect to see? So often we don't. Rather than seeing an increased membership list or more people in the pews after telling everyone about God's saving grace, maybe all we will see is the same old faces and just a few new faces – and we wonder what is going on and we wonder if God's Word is actually working. Well, we need to have faith and be patient and let God work, for he tells us in the parable, **“All by itself the soil produces the grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head”**. A mature Christian isn't grown overnight if you will. It may take more time than we'd like, but be patient, God is working. Not only does this promise encourage us in our witnessing efforts, but also in our own faith life. Maybe we've been coming to church for quite a while and are still struggling from some of the same sins that we have been for a while. Maybe we feel as if it just isn't doing any good, that you're just not growing in your faith. Have faith, and continue to let God work in your heart.

He works in your heart every time you're here, every time you attend the Lord's Supper, every time you read from the Bible in your homes. Have patience and let God work.

## **2. Faith that God's Church is growing**

Another interesting happens when you are planting seeds with your kids. They think that the bigger the seed, the bigger the plant. It seems to make sense, but it is not true. In the same way we can't judge God's Kingdom by looking at its beginning. Jesus uses another seed which was known for its small size in his second parable – the mustard seed. He says that the kingdom of God is like that mustard seed. It's not a grand and glorious seed; you wouldn't expect big things out of it. But yet out of those humble beginnings – being one of the smallest seeds there is – a great tree-like plant is the end result. So large is this plant that birds can actually nest in its branches.

With this parable Jesus is acknowledging that from a worldly point of view, the beginning of His kingdom was really no big deal. It was a kingdom without land, without armies, certainly without an imposing king. In fact the king came in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. His first "claim to fame" was ducking out of town to avoid Herod's henchmen. And when he proclaimed His Word he didn't attract the social elite, but rather humble fishermen. Yet despite this, he wanted his disciples to have patience – patience to see the end result. Just as the end result of the mustard seed was a grand and glorious plant, so also the end result of His kingdom – the eternal fruits will be large indeed.

This same Gospel that has the power to bring people to faith will do just that. We should not get discouraged, and we should not lose patience thinking that God's kingdom only grows if our church does. We have God's promise that it is growing. And we also have his promise that He will work and grow it more wherever that Gospel is planted. So let's keep sowing that Gospel seed. God promises rich rewards when we do.

There is nothing quite like the day that the first sprout comes out of the ground as your child comes running in the house to tell you. The excitement is even greater when that first bean shows up on the bean plant or the first tomato forms and ripens. It is this excitement that makes them want to plant seeds again the next year and so on. I pray we find even greater joy and excitement as you witness the results of the Word being planted in your heart and the hearts of those whom you have told God's saving Word. God's Word is working faith, and the end result is going to be heaven one day. I hope that this so excites you, that you too will keep sowing the seed of the Gospel, as you seek to expand Christ's kingdom as well. Have faith that God's Word is working and your faith and the faith of others will grow. Be patient though, it doesn't happen overnight, but it lasts for eternity. Amen.