

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 3B (Proper 6B)
June 13, 2021
Mark 4:26-34

The Seed Sprouts and Grows

And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. 27 He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. 28 The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." (Mark 4:26-29 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

Anyone who has ever tried to raise a crop knows what Jesus is talking about today. The gardener and the farmer know that planting seed requires faith and patience. For after preparing the soil, adding nutrients and fertilizer, and planting, you have to wait for the seed to sprout and grow, which it will do whether you are sleeping or awake. The seed sprouts and grows by itself. Then, at the proper time, there is the harvest.

Jesus says that the "kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground" and wait for the harvest. Thus, the kingdom of God is God's. The Church is Christ's. It's all His work as He brings it into being and sustains its growth. And how does He do that? Through His Word which is like the seed in Jesus parable. Like the sower in the parable we don't know how the seed grows, but we trust that it *will* grow as God grants it. So it is with the Word of God. We don't know how it works to grow the kingdom of God, but we trust that it does. It's as God tells us through Isaiah the prophet, "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Is. 55:10-11).

Indeed, the power for growth lies in the seed itself. Yet, the seed must be planted. In another place, Jesus said that the seed must first die before it brings forth life. Thus God's Word of Law must first kill us as it condemns us poor sinners and brings us to our knees in sorrow and repentance. Then His Word of the Gospel, His Word of forgiveness for each and every sin through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross, brings forth life in us. So, when the Word of God is preached in our midst, when Baptism and Holy Communion are practiced among us in faithfulness to His Word, God is at work growing His Kingdom. As the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed, God is at work growing His Church. For as that precious seed is sown in our hearts, as it takes root, it grows by itself. After all, there is nothing good about the soil of

our hearts. By nature it is rock hard. But the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ breaks through that hardness and new life begins to grow.

And as that life is now planted and growing within us, God may use us to scatter the seed. In that case, we are simply His instruments, but it is still His job to make the seed take root and grow. And that often makes it difficult for us. After the seed is sown, after the Gospel is proclaimed, we have to wait. We don't like that. We want to hurry things along somehow. We want to see results. We think we have to do something to "spice it up" or make it more effective. However, there's nothing we need to add or can add to the Word of God to make it work faster or more effectively. The seed, the Word, grows automatically. It grows in and of itself. Just as we can't see a seed grow nor understand how it produces a plant, so we can't see the Word of God growing faith in a person's heart, even our own, nor understand how it produces life and growth.

Added to this is the frustration of not seeing the results of our sowing. We tend to think that when we scatter the Word of God we should see instant results. And we're disappointed when we don't see them. But we shouldn't be. Just as we don't see fruit immediately appear after planting, so we don't see the fruit of faith suddenly appear. It may take time, a lot of it. In fact, we may never see the fruit.

Yet, we continue to pray, "Thy kingdom come." But lest we think God needs our prayer to make His kingdom come, we remember what we learned in the catechism, "The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also." And "God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity."

When we hear of Jesus' life of perfect obedience to His Father's will, when we hear of His sacrificial death on the cross for our sins, when we hear of His resurrection from the dead, when we hear of His ascension and continual reign over His kingdom, when we have our sins forgiven for Jesus' sake, the seed is planted in our hearts. As that seed takes root and grows, fruits are produced - faith in Jesus Christ and acts of service to our fellow man. Yet, this is none of our own doing. It is all God's gracious work in us. And if by chance someone should come to faith because we told them the Good News about Jesus, we don't take the credit for it. For it is still totally God's work. He may use us to do the sowing, but He causes the Word to grow, and He gathers the harvest in His time.

What great comfort this is! You didn't have to find a way to come to faith in Christ. God did it by planting His Word in Your heart. You don't have to find ways to make your faith grow and become stronger. God does it by giving You His Word as it's preached and taught, and as it's joined with bread and wine in Holy Communion. And, when you tell others about Jesus, you are not responsible for bringing them to faith in Christ with your persuasive testimony or a better example of Christian living. God is responsible for that. It's up to Him to cause the seed to take root and grow, producing faith and a new life in that person, even as He does in you.

Yes, the kingdom of God is God's. He brings it into being, cares for it, nourishes it, and it grows as He desires. Likewise, the kingdom of God is the Church, and the Church is "an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (2 Corinthians 5:1). It is *God's* Kingdom, after all, not ours. He said, "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar." (Ezek. 17:22-23).

And as Jesus tells us how growth in the kingdom occurs, we can rejoice that He has planted His seed, His Gospel, within us, and causes spiritual growth to occur in us. And though we may not see it or feel it, He has done it yet again today. Praise God for His Word which sprouts and grows. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener