

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 4B - Proper 6B
June 16, 2024
Mark 4:26-34

How Does Your Garden Grow?

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,

At least one among us is happy that we have green paraments on the altar, pulpit, and lectern. Of course, we don't use green to make him happy, but because green is the liturgical color for the season after Pentecost and Holy Trinity. This long green season, in which there are very few festivals, is a season of long, steady growth in the Christian faith, in the life of discipleship.

Today we hear Jesus teach about life as His disciples, life in the kingdom of God. He uses the imagery of a seed being sown and producing growth. Indeed, He had already told the parable of the sower whose seed fell on different kinds of soil. Today, He speaks similarly. And His example is easy to understand, if we have ears to hear. For everyone sees the phenomenon of something growing from a small, insignificant seed into a large plant – whether for beauty, a in flowers or trees, or for food. And while we've seen it, and, in fact, count on it, we don't really understand it or how it happens. It really is a mystery that a seed has the surprising power to grow.

So, "How Does Your Garden Grow?" In other words, how does your life as a disciple of Jesus grow? How does our life together as Christ's Church grow?

Now before we get to far, we need to remember that it's not really "your" garden. It's not even "our" garden. It's God's garden! The garden and the growth and the greening up belong to God! He planted this garden, the kingdom of God, and He's the one who makes it grow, just as He did with the sprig from the top of a cedar (Ezek. 17:22). The growth is not up to us, either in our individual life as Christians or in our life together as Church. It happens even when we can't see it. God will make His garden grow as He will. Only God can make a tree, and only God can make a garden grow.

Think of it in terms of the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come." How did you learn it in the Catechism? "Thy kingdom come. What does this mean? The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also." Yes, God's Kingdom comes by itself, without anything that we do causing it to happen. But we do want God's Kingdom to come among us.

This is what Jesus teaches us in His parable about the mysterious growing power of the seed. He says: "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear."

The point is that the power to produce a crop is packed into the seed itself. If you've ever planted seed, in a garden or in a field, you know there's not really anything for you to do but sit back and relax, in a sense, because the growing power is all packed into that little tiny seed. It's really quite mysterious and miraculous! And it draws our attention to that seed that God created and causes to grow, and it draws our attention away from any human effort or contribution on our part.

Now, you know that to produce a beautiful garden there are certain things you do need to do: tilling the soil, watering the ground, rain, sunshine, pulling out the weeds, and so on. And that's all well and good. But sometimes we forget about the most basic thing needed to produce a beautiful flower or vegetable in our garden, and that is the seed! Everything is packed into that seed! There would be no peony or rose, no cucumber or tomato, no corn or beans, no plant or growth of any kind, unless there was first the seed and that God grants the growth!

So look to the seed when you want to know how God's garden grows. God has packed everything needed for producing beautiful fruit in our lives: He has packed it into the seed that He sows. And the seed is, I'm sure you know, the Word! It is the word of God that produces any life in us. It is God's Word that produces the growth. It is the living, active, powerful, creative Word of God, especially His gospel Word, which gives us life and sustains our life. This is true whether we're talking about our life as individual Christians or our life as the Church. God's Word is the seed that we need in order to grow.

Yet, sometimes we do think it's up to us. "I just need to try harder to be a better Christian, by mustering up my will and effort." "I'm really gonna try hard this time, I know it!" And then we fail and fall backward. We need the Word, especially God's Word of forgiveness in Christ and of new life in the Spirit, in order to grow the garden that is our Christian life. How does your garden grow? By God's Word being planted in the soil of your soul, week after week,

day after day, year after year. Word and Sacrament--there is no substitute or shortcut. The gospel seed is our greatest need.

And here it is, the seed being planted in you again here this week: The gospel seed, with the power of growth packed into it, is the great good news of Christ Jesus your Savior. This same Jesus, the one teaching you this parable, is the one who gives you life by the word of His death and resurrection. God's Son came down from heaven, to live and die for you, when you had no life in yourself. He did it all for you, fulfilling the law you broke, dying on the cross for all your sins and transgressions, paying the full price that sets you free. He Himself was planted in the ground, buried, like a seed that was sown, that out of His death would come life everlasting-- always green, forever green-- for all of us. This is the good news, the gospel seed that produces the kingdom of God in our midst. All the life-giving, growing power comes from God and is packed into the seed that is the gospel. New life, eternal life, life in the Spirit, a life of faith in God, in Christ, and love for others-- everything you need is packed into this seed.

Thus God sows His Word: rightly preached and taught and, if you will, sacramented. That's how God's Kingdom comes among us. In the Word preached truly and faithfully. In practice that reflects and reinforces pure doctrine. Through the sacraments of God rightly administered. To be sure, it's not always popular. It won't necessarily draw big crowds. For people can reject the Word of God that is sown, and they often do. But God will bring life out of the ground, and He will grow His Church around the world in His own time and in His own way as He will.

And as God's Word is sown in you and the Church, it will produce the growth as God determines. The growth in you may be gradual and hard to notice from day to day. It may often seem like two steps forward, one step back. Thank God that the gospel word is a word of forgiveness, because that is just what we need as faltering, often-failing disciples. Yet, God is doing His work in me and in you. That's why we always need this Gospel Word, week after week, because our life is one of rather unspectacular, but gradual, steady growth over the long haul, in faith and in discipleship and in love for God and others.

This is the long green meadow we're walking in. It's not always easy being green--there are growing pains along the way. But it is June, and everything is green or turning green. And God is growing His garden, His Kingdom, among us. Amen.

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

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener
Pastor

Immanuel Lutheran Church of Augsburg
1297 E 900 Ave.

Shobonier, IL 62885

church: (618) 846-8383

personal cell: 330-204-4180