

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018

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**Mark 4:26-34** <sup>26</sup> And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, <sup>27</sup> "and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. <sup>28</sup> "For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. <sup>29</sup> "But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." <sup>30</sup> Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? <sup>31</sup> "*It is* like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; <sup>32</sup> "but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade." <sup>33</sup> And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear *it*. <sup>34</sup> But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.

### **The power hidden in God's Word**

It's probably really hard to do this. We are so used to seeds and what they do. You plant a seed and it grows up into a plant. Yet, if you can imagine for a moment that you had never in your life seen a seed. You had never heard about them. You knew nothing about them. Then someone comes to you and says here plant this seed and soon you will have corn plant this high. Would anyone looking at that seed believe for a moment that such a thing was possible?

The word of God is the same way. It is just a collection of stories, what can it do? Yet this is the way that God works, He hides His power in common earthly things.

He hides His power in every seed you plant. The dream of the medieval man was that some day he could point at the soil and say "fruges" and out of the earth would spring forth corn, or "siligo" and there would be a head of wheat. In other words he would like direct access to that creative power of God. But God has hidden that power in this little seed. If you want corn to grow you plant the seed.

Sure you could scientifically explain to some extent how the seed grows, but ultimately the truth is because God hides the power of life in this little seed.

This is the way God works he does not give us direct access to His power but he always hides it in some common earthly thing. The life of a corn plant is hidden in the seed. The spiritual life of man is hidden in the word and the sacraments.

### **The power hidden in the word accomplishes two things**

In the first parable it brings someone to faith and causes them to grow and produce fruits thus this parable is concerned with the power of the Word to affect an individual

In the second parable that same power builds God's kingdom, from a small thing starting with twelve apostles into a large tree from which every tribe and tongue and nation receives a resting place.

In either case the basic underlying message is the same, God's power which is hidden in a seemingly small and useless thing has the power to become something great. The difference is only in application, whether we are talking about what it does for us in our life or what it does for the church.

### **Concerning the first parable and God's word in our life**

The first parable makes it clear that God's word planted in our hearts will grow and produce fruits.

Please note that the parable makes it clear that we are the soil. We are not the seed or the plant. God's word is planted in our hearts. It grows. It produces fruit. We are just the vessel. We do nothing.

This is a mystery, something we cannot understand. This is not the way we think things should be done. We think if I want to be a better person I have to go out and do something. God says no, If you want to grow in your faith, go to my word.

It is a mystery. It is also something we cannot see. Notice the man in the parable goes to sleep and wakes, sleeps and wakes and the seed grows slowly over time. The Word of God grows slowly. This really shouldn't surprise us. All we have to do is look around at nature to know this is the way God works. Yet for some reason we expect God to work differently when it comes to spiritual things.

How often have you said a prayer like this, "Lord, I'd like a little patience. Well where is it? Are you going to give it to me or not Lord?"

God's word is going to grow and we don't understand how, but that doesn't mean we can't help or hinder it. You plant a seed and leave it alone, it will grow. You plant a seed. You water it. You fertilize it. You weed it. It will grow stronger, faster and produce more.

I remember one summer when it was the job of my brother Aaron and I to fertilize the garden. There was this thing we attached to the hose and the fertilizer was in this thing and when you watered the plants the fertilizer went out with the water. So we were supposed to stand and water/fertilizer each corn plant for so many seconds. Of course we wanted to see if this fertilizer really made any difference. So we picked out one corn plant and we watered/fertilized that plant twice as long as the others. It grew faster and taller than all the other corn plants. In fact it was the first to ripen. Unfortunately that meant it was the first to get stolen by the coons.

When you water and fertilize with God's word and sacraments that which God has planted in your heart grows faster and stronger and produces more. But this is slow and unseen growth and therefore we have tendency to minimize or completely disregard the effect of that word. We think because it doesn't immediately produce an effect it's not really worth doing. We come to church and well not much happens. We come to the Lord's Supper and well we don't really feel any different.

The power of God is rarely if ever a startling brilliant flash. The power of God is the slow steady growth. This means making frequent steady use of the word and the sacraments.

This means coming to church, yes, every Sunday. This means devotions at home, especially when you have children at home. This means regular attendance at the Lords Supper for those who are able.

**This all applies equally to the second parable and mission work as well.**

In the second parable God's kingdom begins small but quickly grows and spreads throughout the world. And the forgiveness of sins through Jesus becomes a resting place for people in every corner of the globe.

Once again we don't know how but we do know what is needed: His word.

If you want to share the word you need to know the word. That means coming to services and also to bible class. Bible class is your opportunity to ask further questions about what you heard in the sermon. Bible class is your opportunity to ask questions about what is going on in the world. It's our opportunity to discuss what are good ways and bad ways to share that word.

The power is in God's word, but we can certainly learn how to better use and share that word.

Is this congregation living or dead? Dying or growing? If we were listed with those seven congregations in the book of revelations, what would God say about us? If we want to grow in our life or as a church, we need to not just hear the Word but use the word. "Read, learn, mark and inwardly digest it."

What is your idea of devotion? You read a piece of scripture and have some little comfort or some little thing to think of for the day? What a limited use of God's word that is. The word of God is the power of life. It is the water of life. Learn to drink deeply from it. In your personal devotion come to the word asking the Lord, "What have I done wrong today?" Come to the word asking here are all my problems what should I do about these things?

That which seems to be important, that which seems to be a big deal is really nothing.

God uses the picture of the seed and the farmer. And maybe in our day the farmer is thought of as a little thing. But really when it comes down to it the most important thing in life is food and water isn't it? You can have all the money in the world. You can have the fanciest house. You can be the smartest guy. If you don't have food and water all these things are nothing.

The power of life is in that seed, not just the life of the plant but all life on earth. Jesus shows us there is one thing even more important than food. The word and the sacraments, they have the power of life not just on earth but beyond. There is given the forgiven of sins. There is the grace of God.

The Lord will grow the word by His power. But here we learn to pray that he may cause that word to grown in us and among us as well through the power of His word.

AMEN