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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
June 7, 2015
2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 12:1-4, Acts 2:42-47

Hymns: 296; 753; 49; 52 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Mark 4:26-29

26 And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, 27 and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. 28 For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Sometimes we ask the wrong question.

Asking the wrong question often comes from being concerned about the wrong thing. But sometimes it just doesn't seem possible not to be concerned about that other thing.

What the Lord is addressing in our text today is the growth of the kingdom of God. What we are sometimes focused on is the growth of the local congregation. How can we not be concerned about that? Look at how few are here this morning! And don't we all

agree that we need this congregation? We need what the Lord brings us here in the saving truth of His Word. We need it now as much as any time in world history as the devil raises his forces against the truth, and sin and corruption appear to flourish, and there are so many influences in this world that tempt us and would undermine our faith. So we often find ourselves talking about how we can get new members to join the church. We look at the need for members in the local congregation when the Lord is telling us that our concern should be focused on the growth of the Kingdom of God. While the two are related they are not the same thing. Let us sit at Jesus' feet this morning and learn about –

THEME: The Growth of the Kingdom of God.

It starts with—

I. The Sowing of the Right Seed

Jesus often taught with parables. They were object lessons that helped people retain the lesson. However they also needed some explanation that the right lesson might be learned. There was quite a bit of confusion about the nature of the Kingdom of God during the time of Jesus' ministry. It was perceived by many to be an earthly kingdom with borders and political power and influence in the world. So it was also misunderstood how this Kingdom would come. People were taught to expect a political upheaval with a new world order coming into place. Actually there are some Christians today that still suffer from these false expectations and misunderstandings. Because of this, to some degree, they may be missing out on some of the comfort of the truth.

There is also the confusion we already mentioned of equating the visible church or church organizations with the invisible, universal Church, which is the Kingdom of God. This may lead to some false ideas about how real growth might be secured. It very often comes down to thinking about different tactics and programs that might attract people in the community to one's church. So let's turn back to Jesus' parable and see if that leads us in a different direction.

Mark 4:26 “And He said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground,’”

What the Lord is telling us is that we don't need to look for a new device to help Him prosper the kingdom of God. It is like a farmer going out and scattering seed. Ahh, but what is that seed? It is the Word of God! More specifically it is the gospel of God's love and forgiveness. We do well to note that this is the planting of a field. At the time that Jesus taught this parable seed was scattered by broadcasting by hand. One would take a handful of seed and fling it out across the cultivated field. Today farmers have carefully designed machines to set the seed down exactly where they want it to end up. The similarity is that the field is going to get covered. Farmers today cover vast areas quite efficiently. However the essential point is that the seed is delivered to the field.

Jesus was teaching the disciples of the importance of getting the seed of the Word out into the field of the world. If the seed doesn't get scattered that's the end of the story. That is still the point we need to take to heart. The Seed of the Word of God needs to be broadcast, with the original meaning of the word. We may use technology to do that with the modern meaning of the word "broadcast" being the method chosen, by radio program, or TV programming, or the using a web page on the internet. Every week we use different methods of scattering the seed of the Word. The message of Jesus as our crucified and Risen Lord who secured eternal life for each and every one of us goes out there into the world, and we don't know exactly where it lands, but it goes out starting here in this pulpit, and then through the mail and through our web site, and through email, and through TV. We know where some of the seed lands but not all of it. And that is the way it should be. That is exactly what the Lord Jesus asked us to do, **"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"** (Mark 16:15)!

Different clubs and programs and fellowships can be great, fun blessings within a congregation, but they must not take the place of scattering the seed, or thought of as a better way to bring growth to the church. The farmer scatters the seed and --

II. The Wonder of Growth Appears.

That is the next lesson to learn from Jesus' parable.

Mark 4:26-28 “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. 28 For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.”

There are wonders in this world that we may never be able to explain. Scientists have done a great deal of research into exactly how a seed sprouts and grows. We have watched it since we were children. We may have even done little experiments with seeds in tiny pots of soil or wrapped in damp pieces of paper towel. We know what happens as the damp seed begins to germinate. Jesus laid out the obvious visible steps in His parable. The hidden power of the seed and the germ of life within that seed can be described in even greater detail today, but we should not think that we possess the answer to the key of life because of that. Life is still a mystery. The seed that is planted in the ground and then, when it's all wet and soggy, sprouts and grows, that is still a wonder that we witness in our gardens and the fields that surround us.

So it is with the seed of the Word that has been scattered out into the world. It takes hold in the soil of people's hearts. It sprouts into a tender young faith. It takes root in the heart. It grows and becomes strong as it continues to feed on the strength of the Word of God. Finally it produces fruit. With grains like wheat or oats one sees the full head of grain. With corn we look for the full ears of corn. So with human we look for fruit to develop as the faith matures. We don't always know in whom this will happen, but it happens, and it is a wonder. It is something that we can pray about. It is something that we trust the Lord to cause to happen, and He promises that it will. The Lord promised through the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 55:10-11 “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, 11 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.”

It's a wonder of grace when the Word cast like seed into the ground takes hold, and a cold stony heart becomes a warm, living heart. That is what the Lord desires. It is His gracious good will that lost, sinful people be brought to faith in this way and possess eternal life. This is His way in the world, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16). It comes through the scattering of the seed of the Word of God. And it leads to the most glorious result.

III. The Harvest Goal is Attained.

Mark 4:29 ““But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.””

The goal of the farmer is to have a good harvest and to store his crops in the barn. He is careful about the timing. Around here we may see farmers walk into the corn field and pull open an ear of corn to see how it is drying, and when the time is right he does not delay. He gathers his harvest into the barn and rejoices in the abundant crop that came from the scattering of the seed. Anyone that has even just had a garden understands that picture. Every year we rejoice and give thanks to God for the food He abundantly supplies. The garden teaches us where our food comes from, that it comes to us from the Lord, and the gracious working of His ways in nature which He created for our good and blessing.

The Lord's parable concerns a harvest of souls. When the time is right the Lord shall have His harvest and shall gather together all that are His into the heavenly storehouse where eternal life is to be found. This is the lesson Jesus wants us to take home about the kingdom of God. It is all about that final harvest. Because the Lord has allowed us to participate in the scattering of the seed, because He has given us this wondrous purpose for this mundane life, we will also share in the joy of the harvest. By the grace of God we will not only be among those gathered together to the Lord, but we will see others with whom we shared the Word being gathered together with us in the harvest of souls. What a joy that will be! And I am absolutely certain that while the Lord knows all those who are His we shall be surprised by a few, maybe even more than

a few because we didn't know they had that seed of the Word growing in their hearts.

The other side of that is that if they surprise us then, we don't see it now. Remember where we started, that we sometimes have the wrong focus, ask the wrong question because we have a faulty concern. We are more worried about the growth of an outward organization that is intended to serve God's purpose than we are about the actual growth of the kingdom of God. Often the growth of the one will result in the growth of the other, but we don't know the correlation. In the meantime let's be faithful to the role the Lord has given us, scattering the seed. Let's scatter the seed of the Word everywhere in every way we may be able but let's scatter that seed. The Lord will bring the increase. The Lord will cause His kingdom to grow, and we will be blessed as the Lord adds to our numbers those who are being saved. It will all come together in His good time and according to His gracious good will.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.