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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
June 20, 2021
4th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Ezekiel 17:22-24, 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Hymns: 294; 507; 306:1,4,6; 309

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

Sermon Text: Mark 4:26-34

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."

³⁰ Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? ³¹ *It is* like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; ³² 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."

³³ And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear *it*. ³⁴ But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

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

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Confidence

Confidence in what you are doing can be very key to one's success. A lack of confidence that is perceived by others conveys a very negative message about what an individual is trying to accomplish. Whether that is presenting an idea, promoting a product, or repairing a car, or visiting a doctor, if one perceives that the individual delivering the needed product or service is not confident in that product or service that works against achieving the goal one may have in helping that individual. No one wants to go to a mechanic who seems to lack confidence in his ability to repair your car. No one wants to have a physician attend to your needs who is less than qualified. A lot of the problems in combating the pandemic went back to conflicting messages and an apparent lack of confidence in the message that was being delivered.

Now, that was serious business, but it was not as serious as the matter that is before us this morning. If you are wondering how that is even possible when 600 hundred thousand Americans have died from complications related to the Covid 19 virus, consider this: while Covid 19 spread throughout the world, it is not as universal at the dread disease of sin. While Covid 19 ended millions of physical lives with temporal death, sin has brought death to **every** soul, and in the end would deliver its victims to an eternity of death in hell. There is a safe haven from the dread pandemic of sin, and it is found in the kingdom of God.

We know this safe haven for ourselves. We possess the confidence of faith that our sins are forgiven because of the blood of Christ! That confidence will be reinforced again today with both Word and sacrament as we receive the very body and true blood given and shed for us for the remission of sins. We rejoice in the deliverance from sin and death that we possess in Christ Jesus. Then, where's the problem? The problem is in our weakness in delivering this same message of the gospel with **confidence!** With the use of two different parables our Savior would teach us to -

THEME: Sow the Seed of the Word with Confidence.

On the occasion before us in our text Jesus had been teaching several lessons regarding the Kingdom of God with parables. Each parable had its own point of comparison, its own lesson. As we consider Jesus' parables we need to be careful that we stay focused on the particular point Jesus was making with each parable. The first parable before us is the Parable of the Growing Seed. The point Jesus is making is --

I. This Seed Will Bring Forth Faith.

In an earlier parable Jesus taught on that day, the Parable of the Sower and the Seed, Jesus addressed the point that not all who hear the Word will end up with saving faith. there will be different results. As I said already it is important for us to stay focused on the particular point Jesus is making with each parable. This parable addresses the power of the Word of God. It is a clear point that should address the problem among believers of lacking an absolute confidence in that power of the Word to save, to change hearts, to produce believers.

“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.” (Mark 4:26-29)

We have been commissioned by the Lord to proclaim the gospel in all the world, The point of the parable is that the gospel is being planted in the fields of this world. When we plant a garden we watch with anticipation. We know what is supposed to happen. We expect results. We watch for the seed to germinate and for sprouts to break through the ground. Again, in this parable we are not addressing the issues that prevent some seeds from growing into fruit bearing plants in the spiritual realms. We are addressing the power that lies in that seed that was planted in the ground. We have confidence that the seeds we plant in the ground have this life force, this germ of life that will germinate and sprout. We expect that. We then expect that tender shoot to grow and mature and become a stronger plant. All of this started with the power in the

seed. Without that power in the seed producing the plant in the first place there would be no growth. Ultimately the plant matures and produces the fruit that we expect, and the fruit is harvested. This often means that the plant is removed.

Out back, behind church, there is a field of soybeans. They have germinated quite successfully. That power was in the seed. Now the plants are a few inches tall, but we may have every confidence that these plants will continue to grow. Then they will form pods which will fill out, and when ripe the farmer will run his combine through the field and harvest his crop.

What lessons are we to learn from this parable for our lives and experiences in this life as a part of the kingdom of God? Even as the seed is the Word, specifically the Word of the gospel, we should possess confidence in the Word to perform just as it did in this parable. Start at the beginning. As we desire to fulfill the Lord's commission to make disciples of all the nations, (Matthew 28:19) let us do so with confidence that the gospel is the seed that needs to be planted, and as we sow the seed of the gospel, the power is there to create faith. Peter presented this lesson in his Pentecost sermon when he said, "*For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.*" (Acts 2:39) That chapter concludes with the statement: "*The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*" (Acts 2:47).

But where does it go from there? Those who were called to faith, grew in that faith by the power of that same gospel. They produced fruit, and then the Lord received them into heaven. The harvest of souls by the Lord is not reserved for the end of the world. It is an ongoing reception of the Lord's elect to their eternal home in heaven. The Lord receives them to the glory that He has prepared for them from "*before foundation of the world.*" (Ephesians 1:7)

This is a good thing. This is a wonderful thing! We look forward to that day when the Lord shall receive us into heaven. "*Precious in the sight of the Lord Is the death of His saints.*" (Psalm 116:15)

This is the order of life, not just temporal life, but the order of life unto salvation. We are talking about the confidence that we have

that as we share the Word with others that same wonder of grace, that same good work which has begun in us will be completed with others in the day of Jesus Christ. We each in our turn will go to be with the Lord. This is good, this is all according to God's grace that we possess the victory over sin and death through faith the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Our confidence is in the power of the Seed of the gospel. We need no gimmicks, no extraordinary powers of persuasion. We need only sow the seed of the Word, sharing our faith, proclaiming the gospel of Christ crucified as the way to everlasting life.

II. This Seed Has Great Growth Potential

Uncertainty has got to be the opposite of confidence. The disciples were uncertain about many things. They were uncertain about many things because they had misconceptions about many things, and that included the nature and the future of the kingdom of God. Jesus addressed that with the second parable in our text this morning, the parable of the mustard seed.

“Then He said, ‘To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? ³¹It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; ³²but 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.’ ” (Mark 4:30-32)

The mustard seed is a small seed. The mustard plant in the Middle East may be related to what we identify as a mustard plant in American agriculture, but it is a much larger plant. Let us focus on the point of comparison. One starts with a very small seed, but the final outcome is a very large plant. The mustard plant of the Middle East can grow up to seven feet tall so that birds will actually land and shelter in it.

Jesus' point of comparison for His lesson concerning the kingdom of God is clear. There is no need for uncertainty concerning the future of the kingdom of God. One may be confident that the Lord's will is done and that the vast nature of the kingdom of God is far greater than the imaginings of the disciples sitting a Jesus'

feet. The disciples' grand ideas for the future of the kingdom of God were quite limited. They were limited to a political kingdom within the borders of Judea and Galilee. They were thinking of earthy kingdoms with temporal glory while Jesus was looking at the Kingdom of God's rule in the hearts of men which has an eternal as well as a spiritual nature.

Yes, the beginnings were small, but the future was grand, as grand as any plant growing from a small seed that ultimately provides shelter for the birds of the air. The Lord Jesus was preparing a small band of disciples to be His Apostles, the ambassadors of the gospel to the world. How could such a small band of men serve in such a capacity that the outcome would be the Holy Christian Church on earth? How could this small band of men bring about such a dramatic wonder as a kingdom whose borders extend to the ends of the earth, and whose king shall reign forever. The answer lies in the Seed, which is the Word of God, and not in men. The power is in the Word of God, and the Spirit working through the Word. That is how the kingdom of God grew to be so vast and such a wonder of God's grace and glory that we also, living in America two thousand years later, are a part of this picture, citizens of the kingdom of God.

So let us also learn from this. We too may tend to focus on the small picture. We earnestly and prayerfully desire that St. Paul's Lutheran Church grow. This isn't a bad thing however the advancement of God's kingdom does not rise or fall with the growth of an individual congregation. The kingdom of God is growing even as the Word of God continues to be proclaimed. It is growing everywhere, as children are received into baptismal grace, as the people of the nations of the world hear the wondrous news of a Redeemer who died for them and rose again that they might have life in His name.

Even as we pray "Thy Kingdom come," we may be confident that God's kingdom will come, and that it will come among us also. *"God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy word and live a godly life here in time and hereafter in eternity."* (Luther's Small Catechism – the Second Petition, M. Sydow) That is how it starts, the Holy

Spirit working through the Word in the hearts of sinners. And it ends to our Savior's glory and our eternal salvation.

Finally, a word on how

III. The Lord Grants Spiritual Understanding.

“And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. ³⁴ But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.” (Mark 4:33-34)

The Lord Jesus continued to teach with parables. He taught lessons that some would not grasp, but lessons that others would hold in their hearts for the rest of their lives. These last words of our text explain the difference. Jesus explained the truth to His disciples. How blessed they were to have such personal instruction from the Lord! Do you think they appreciated how special that was? Well, they were certainly blessed by it as they grew in their understanding of the gospel, and maybe years later they would look back upon those day with a greater appreciation of all that they had heard and seen. The Lord Jesus blessed them with saving knowledge of the truth.

We have something that is just as wonderful. We really do! We have the Holy Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments. We have Jesus' words in front of our eyes where we can read them and meditate upon them, as Jesus explains the truth of our salvation for us! With that comes the confidence of faith, and confidence in the Word.

Our lesson today is all about confidence. The seed of the Word may seem small, and its authority, its effectiveness and its power may be questioned by many in this world, but Jesus has given us His Word to take out into the world that peoples of the world might have life. Jesus had every confidence in the power of His Word to take hold of hearts for life and salvation and to build a great and glorious kingdom. May the Spirit give us such confidence in the Word that we may be bold confessors of the faith and sow this tiny Seed of the gospel for the salvation of souls throughout the world!

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)