

**The Second Sunday after Holy Trinity, June 13, 2021**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminster, Massachusetts

## **The Seed Grows**

Mark 4:26–34

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*

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The Word of God for today is the reading from St. Mark's Gospel, in particular this verse from the Parable of the Growing Seed: **"He—the farmer—sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how"** (v 27).

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Jesus doesn't give farmers and gardeners much credit in this parable, certainly far less than they deserve. **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. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come** (vv 26–29).

It's not as simple as that, is it? As scattering seed and then watching the garden grow? A dirt-patch doesn't turn into Eden all by itself. There's the hoeing and the fertilizing, the weeding and watering, the epic battles of gardener versus rabbit and farmer versus deer. That's why the gardener and the farmer boast of their crops. It's why they take pride in the color, size, and taste of the fruit. In Michigan where I grew up, the county fair gave prizes for the best fruits and vegetables. They assumed that the farmer had something to do with it. Each tomato and bushel of corn represents so many hours of work and drops of sweat.

Yet Jesus reduces all this to scattered seed that shoots sprouts while the one who plants it, the sower of the seed, sleeps. His parable has no place for dirt-caked fingernails and sunburned necks; it has no need of trowels or garden hoses or chicken wire. Once the seed is planted, it grows, and grows, and grows. It doesn't need the farmer or the gardener. The farmer can hang out at the breakfast table sipping coffee and reading the paper. He can lay back in the hammock. He can run an errand or take a Sunday drive. Still the seed will grow.

The garden is bare earth one night, yet the next morning it's filled with new plants. A little miracle occurred while the farmer slept. The plants grow, they get tall, they bloom, and the fruit forms and ripens. All this happens automatically: **“the earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear”** (v 28). And when the grain is ripe, then the harvest. No room for boasting over this automatic crop.

But Jesus isn't making a statement about gardening or trying to market a “wonder seed” to farmers. He's talking about the kingdom of God, the church, and His parable makes it clear that this kingdom doesn't depend on us and our efforts. It's not a kingdom that can't be built through our sweat and labor. The church doesn't stand or fall with you or me; though God graciously uses us in this kingdom, its fate doesn't rest on our shoulders. The same holds true on an individual scale: your faith doesn't rest on your own works or achievements, on how well you have cultivated it or lived it out. There's no room to boast about the fine church we've made or what strong faith we have. We aren't so important, so indispensable, or so necessary that God needs us for His work. We don't make His kingdom come. All our self-importance and self-confidence are stripped away.

Still, this parable encourages patience. The seed is planted but the harvest doesn't come the next day. It doesn't happen all at once. It takes place in stages. A little growth here, a little growth there. First the blade, then the ear, then the full grain. Sometimes you can't even see the growth and the changes from day-to-day. But this is how the kingdom of God comes, how God establishes His reign in our lives. He does it slowly, patiently, deliberately through the Word.

So there's a promise packed away in this parable. Jesus throws it out there like a seed scattered on the ground. Whenever He speaks or teaches or does a miracle, He's sowing seed. Through this parable, He says, “For your own part, do nothing, but only rely on Me and on My Word. I am the Seed scattered on the ground. Don't despair or grow concerned about the church, for the church rests on My shoulders. It's My church, created through My Word. Don't despair or grow desperate about your own faith and your failures to lead a holy life, but let My Word be planted, take root, and grow in you.”

So we gather week after week to hear His Word, and we read it at home, so that it will do its slow work in our lives.

Jesus says,

“BE PATIENT AND TRUST ME, MY WORD DOES IT ALL.”

The sweat and labor of our Lord Jesus Christ builds this kingdom. That is what produces fruit—a fruit that lasts forever. You can see His sweat in the Garden of Gethsemane and look upon His labor in the crucifixion. Jesus is the Seed, the kernel of grain that falls into the earth, dies, and is buried; He is the Seed that sprouts up in the resurrection and bears much fruit. The church grows from His work, from His death, His resurrection, and His ascension. This happens truly and certainly where Jesus Christ is present in preaching and His Sacraments, and it happens everywhere He is present. Our anxiety, our worry, our busyness add nothing to what He does. The kingdom of God is given in Jesus Christ the Seed.

Even now everything depends on Jesus Christ. Because He is present here, we know the church is growing here and His kingdom is expanding here and His reign is taking place here. Through preaching, absolution, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, the seed sprouts and grows—in us and in others. We don't know exactly how it happens, but it does. It happens automatically, as Jesus teaches in this parable. The Word works. It doesn't need to be fancy or eloquent or complicated. The Christian church will survive because Jesus gives His Word and promise. Sow anything else, and there'll be no harvest; listen to anything else, and there'll be no growth. Let this alone rule in the church: the proclamation that Jesus Christ has died and is risen for sinners such as us. Sow this seed by the handfuls—Don't be stingy! Don't be shy!—and leave the rest to Jesus. He works as the Word is proclaimed, even as we proclaim the Word. He works just fine. By His Word, He forgives your sins and the those of other sinners. By His Word, He raises the dead and gives you and all believers a life that will never perish. This is the confidence that we have as we go into the world with His Name and His Word. We can speak boldly to others of our Lord Jesus Christ because He backs up our speaking with His promise.

This kingdom of God doesn't look great and impressive, as we might wish. In His second parable, Jesus compares it to a mustard seed—small, insignificant, easy to overlook. It seems like it's nothing. Yet it grows into a great bush, overshadowing the other garden plants, with room for all sorts of birds to nest in its branches. God reveals Himself in things that look as small and as weak as mustard seeds, through means that appear worthless and powerless in the eyes of the world. This kingdom comes in the weakness of the cross and in the death of Jesus Christ. Packed into that mustard seed is the death of all and life for the whole world, the forgiveness of every sin, the resurrection of the dead, and the reconciliation of the world to God. It looks like nothing, yet in it lies shelter and comfort enough for all men.

From that small, unassuming, easily overlooked seed comes the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, a kingdom that will have no end. We rejoice that this kingdom comes to us now, and we look forward to the coming of this kingdom in glory.

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

*Phil 4:7*

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*Revised from a sermon preached by Pastor Gregory on Sunday, June 14, 2009,  
at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana.*