

**The Third Sunday after Holy Trinity, June 16, 2024**

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

## **Like a Man Scattering Seed, Even Mustard Seed**

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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Jesus said, **“The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rise night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. . . It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants”** (vv 26–27, 31–32).

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Why did Jesus come?

For what purpose did He live, die, rise, and ascend to the Father’s right hand?

We believe that he did it for the Church.

Yet it wasn’t because Jesus loved church buildings and wanted lots of them.

To be honest, beautiful architecture didn’t seem to impress Him.

Remember how he said about the temple that one stone wouldn’t remain on another?

And He never once expressed a desire to have buildings named after Himself.

Why did Jesus come?

It wasn’t because He loved being in crowds or wanted to start a social movement.

Of course, crowds did follow Him, at least up until Gethsemane,

but He could’ve had larger, He could’ve kept them longer,

if He’d been willing to give them what they wanted—

more miracles, easier teachings, if He’d gotten “with the times.”

Why did Jesus come?

It wasn’t because He loved the worship, liturgy, and hymns that we love.

He said the time was coming when people would

**“worship the Father in spirit and truth”** (John 4:23),

but He didn’t give the apostles a “church order” to follow,

vestments to wear, or a hymnal to use.

Why did Jesus come?

It wasn't because He loved founding institutions or denominations.  
 He never filled out 501c3 forms or incorporated with the state,  
 nor did He give directions on how to do that.  
 He didn't set out to establish Church in that way,  
 not even the Lutheran church, or our own Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

But I don't mean to imply that Jesus has anything *against*  
 church buildings, congregations, divine worship, or even denominations.  
 In fact, all of these are important  
 They're necessary for the life of the Church.  
 They exist for good reasons, the result of history and tradition  
 and of Christians like us living in particular places at particular times.  
 They can serve the main purpose for which Jesus came.  
 But they are *not* the main purpose.

And they cannot be *our* main purpose either.

That may be what the world means by "Church," but that's not what we mean.

So, why did Jesus come?

He came to plant a kingdom.  
 That's how He describes His purpose, His work—  
 planting seed, seeing it grow, and finally gathering it in:  
**The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.**  
 He scatters seed, then **he sleeps and rises night and day.**  
 As he lays down and gets up, what happens?  
 It's not just an endless repetition of time.  
**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.**  
 And then what?  
**When the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle,**  
**because the harvest has come. (vv 26–29)**

Jesus expresses no anxiety or worry about His kingdom.  
 He knows how things work far better than we do.

He believes in what He's doing, believes even though it leads to a cross.  
He has the confidence and trust of a man who scatters seed and then sleeps well.  
**Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit** (Luke 23:46).  
**It is finished** (John 19:30).

Do we have that same trust?

Do we trust that God's Word will seed faith among us?  
And if we do, then why don't we make more use of that Word?  
Do we trust that it will cause this faith to grow and bear fruit?  
That it will produce good works and lead to a harvest of righteousness?  
That it will do all this not only in your life but in the lives of those around you,  
in your loved ones, your children and grandchildren and friends?

Plant the seed.

That's what Jesus does.  
He plants His kingdom through His own teaching and the gift of Holy Baptism.  
He sustains it and makes it grow through His Word and the gift Holy Communion.  
And so, mysteriously, gradually, even predictably the kingdom grows.

But I know how it is.  
Too often we doubt the effectiveness of the word.  
We get impatient and frustrated.  
It doesn't work quickly enough for us.  
We don't see the results in ourselves or in others.

It's our own lack of faith that leads us to look for something else,  
for something better, for something different than Jesus and His Word.  
Is that why we neglect the Scriptures and turn so often to other things?  
Is it because we believe all those other things—sports, politics, work, whatever—  
are more important, more real, more beneficial for us?  
Is it because we like to be entertained or distracted or even worked up?  
It's true—watching plants grow isn't all that exciting,  
certainly not as exciting as cheering a three pointer, a home run,  
or your favorite politician.

But those things pass away.  
The kingdom of God will remain—it will remain forever.  
Jesus sees and predicts a hidden but glorious future for His Church.

He knows that within the seed lies the power of God to make it grow.  
For Him, the harvest is never in doubt.

We are a people gathered around the Good News of Jesus—  
of Jesus who has been crucified and raised and is now the exalted Messiah.  
We confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.  
That's why He came—to be Lord and to gather a people who confess Him as Lord.

Jesus said:

**With what can we compare the kingdom of God,  
or what parable can we use for it?  
It's like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground,  
is the smallest of all the seeds on earth.**

It looks like nothing.

It appears to hold no promise.

Its beginning is insignificant.

**Yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants  
and puts out large branches.**

It becomes a tree that fills the earth.

**So that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.** (vv 30–32)

We marvel that an acorn turns into an oak or a helicopter into a maple.

Jesus points to the mustard seed—so small, yet so powerful—  
and sees there an image of the kingdom of God.

From tiny beginnings, it will grow into something large.

It will benefit many people around the world and down through history.

It's as if He could see what would become of His movement—

with branches extended around the world that provide refuge for many.

We find peace and hope, forgiveness and life, beneath His branches,  
under the shadow of His wings, underneath the arms of His cross.

And we invite others to do the same.

Week after week gather with our hurts and hopes, our confusions and doubts,  
our faith and the temptations to fall away.

The world will not love us, but here we receive the love of Jesus.

Jesus is the seed planted in the womb of Mary.

He grew up into the tree of the cross whose branches stretch across the world.

Like a mustard seed whose flavor is released when it is crushed,

so Jesus chose to have His body crushed in the mortar of the passion.

He is strong enough to flavor and preserve us all.

What is the Church?

It's not just the building or the congregation or the service or the institution.

It's the rest and protection that we have together in Jesus Christ.

We gather under the safety of His forgiveness.

We gather in the peace of His victory over the devil,

We gather in the promise of life and resurrection.

And He would even use us to gather others—

to welcome our family and friends and neighbors into His kingdom.

The birds of the air nest in the shade of His kingdom.

And this kingdom isn't only found here at Our Savior

or only in our church body or only in our country.

The Church is bigger than us.

We are one small branch of a plant that's still growing and spreading.

The Church is as big as the salvation won by Jesus.

Jesus said that where two or three are gathered in His name,

there He is—there is a place of rest.

What a comfort to know that the people of God are found in many nations  
around the world.

Fathers, this is also the kind of home you seek to provide for your family.

A home where your family can shelter under Christ,

find refuge in His forgiveness,

and have peace in His promises.

**Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly,**

**teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.**

**Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**

**with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col 3:15–16).**

May this be the center of our homes and our church.

And all of this with an eye to what lies ahead.

For this is how God's Word paints the future:

As all kinds of birds nesting in the shade of a mighty cedar tree (Ezek 17:24).

As **a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,**  
**the heavenly dwelling** that we long to put on (2 Cor 5:1–2).

As when the grain is ripe, the sickle is pulled out, and the harvest has come (v 29).

Lord, as You have begun the good work of planting Your kingdom

in our world, among us, and even in us,  
so preserve Your Church, cause her to grow, make her healthy, produce fruit,  
and bring us at last to a full and glorious harvest.

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

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*Phil 4:7*