

The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

June 28, 2009

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Mark 4:26-34 - Pentecost 4

He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain--first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade." With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything. (NIV)

I once walked right across the Mississippi River. Some people who have seen or crossed the Mississippi River might think that I'm lying or telling a big tale because this mighty river at certain points is many miles wide and reaches great depths. Over fifty million people live in states drained by this river that flows nearly 4000 miles into the Gulf of Mexico. But I am not lying. I walked across the Mississippi River. That is because when I was a kid my parents took me up to the cool clear waters of Lake Itasca in northern Minnesota. There the Mississippi River begins as only a little stream about 10 or 12 feet wide and about 2 feet deep. In fact, if I remember my grandparents even bought me a Lake Itasca T-shirt that said: "*I walked across the Mississippi River.*" Looking at that little stream you would never guess that water would grow and grow into the mighty Mississippi. What begins so small and shallow becomes very large and impressive.

Today, Jesus turns our attention to something that grows and grows. Jesus points us to something that begins small but becomes large and impressive. This morning Jesus teaches us a couple of lessons concerning the kingdom of God. As we listen to our Savior speak I pray we consider how: **God's Kingdom Grows. In individual hearts. As the greatest of all.**

Jesus taught many parables which we might describe as earthly stories with heavenly meanings. Here Jesus is teaching about God's kingdom. Please understand most often when the Bible talks about the kingdom of God it's describing more than just a place or a certain realm. God's kingdom is His entire reign. It is God's rule. We know God rules in the hearts of His people through His Word. Jesus says "*This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain--first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.*"

Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a man scattering seed. In Jesus' day it would have been a familiar picture - a man carefully scattering the seed on the soil. But that is all the man can do is put the seed on the ground. He can't make the seed grow. He does not even know how it grows. He just gets up and sleeps and waits. When it grows and becomes ripe he takes in the harvest and rejoices in it.

Do you see how this man scattering the seed is like the kingdom of God? ***"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."*** God has given us the seed to spread. He has given us the good news about Jesus. We have His all-powerful Word. And it works. We take a little water and put in on a baby's head in the name of the triune God, and on Friday little Emma Rose and this morning little Rhylee Russell have both become children of God. A seed is planted. Faith in Jesus is given and there is life. Faith in Jesus continues to grow and grow as the Word is taught. People keep growing in knowledge and grace and love as they hear the good news of Jesus. Finally, in God's time and according to His will the harvest is ready and God calls His child home. A believer is taken to heaven. A harvest is always a reason to rejoice.

We have a great privilege of being able to spread the seed and watch God work. But there is also a couple warnings for us here. There is no need for us to change the seed. Don't mess with God's Word. It is living and powerful and active. It accomplishes what God desires. It works even if we don't always see it or get the results as quickly or in the quantity we want. It works even if we don't understand or see why. We are just to spread God's Word to as many people as we can and teach God Word as clearly and carefully as we are able. Then realize it is God who creates faith and makes faith grow. It is not up to us to convince people to believe in Jesus. When people are brought to faith it is certainly not our doing. As Paul writes: ***"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow"*** (1 Corinthians 3). What an awesome thing it is to see God grow His kingdom - to see God at work in the individual hearts of people - to see God bring forth fruits of faith - to see God preparing a harvest.

To what would you compare Christ's kingdom? That's the question Jesus asks his disciples. ***"What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?"*** Think for a second how you might answer that question. What would you use to describe God's kingdom? Jesus uses this. Can you even see it? This is a mustard seed. Pretty tiny huh? Talk about unimpressive. About as tiny as a little baby born in a stable in an ordinary little town called Bethlehem. About as small as a Teacher with fishermen and tax collectors as His followers. About as unimpressive as a self proclaimed Messiah who is nailed to a cross and killed by His own people. This seed is kind of tiny and unimpressive like a bunch of disciples hiding behind locked doors in fear or a group of about 120 who had a task of going into all the world.

Now do you see the point Jesus is making in this parable? ***"It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."*** Like a small mustard seed that becomes the largest plant in the garden so it is with God's kingdom. The mustard plant in Palestine towers 12-15 feet in the air and offers shade and branches for birds. Out of such a little seed comes a great plant - the largest of all the garden plants.

Dear friends, how much more this is true of Christ's kingdom! It has become by far the greatest kingdom of all. Where else do you find a Savior who came and took the place of sinners so that He could live in their stead? Where else do you find a Savior who willingly suffers what sinners deserve? Where else do you find a Savior who loves you so much that He willingly lays down His life to save you? Where else do you find a Savior who goes to a cross and sheds His blood so that your sins could all be washed away? Where else do you find a Savior who says He will not only suffer & die for you, but on the third day He will rise again and then He does it? In fact, where else do you find a Savior at all?

That's what makes God's kingdom the greatest of all. It offers all people what they need. He gave us Jesus to save us from sin - for the times we would rather twist or change God's Word, for the times we haven't trusted it's power, for the times we have foolishly taken credit that belongs to God. Jesus saved us. He has given us life. We have a place where we can find shade - rest and forgiveness for all of our sins. We have a safe place to dwell forever.

While Jesus' kingdom may have started small, now it is not so unimpressive. An empty tomb, a day where 3000 were baptized, a time when the Lord kept adding to their numbers daily, a time right now when people from every tribe, nation, and language know one common word - Jesus. That is more than impressive. That's mighty! That's awesome! That's the kingdom of God - His rule in the hearts of His people everywhere. We thank God that His kingdom continues to grow and grow. We pray that God's kingdom continues to come. We pray that many more know Jesus as their Savior. We wait for the final harvest. Rejoice that God has made us His children so that we may live in His kingdom now and forever. Amen.