

Proper 6

Mark 4:26-34

June 16, 2024 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

God's Word Grows God's Kingdom

I've always admired the faith of the farmer. Every year, he takes all of his money and buries it in the ground. He buys seeds and buries them. The farmer trusts that the seeds will grow and there will be a harvest. This morning Jesus compares God's Word to a seed that a farmer plants in the ground. We are reminded that God's Word grows God's kingdom.

You can not see God's Kingdom because you can not see into people's hearts. God's kingdom is faith in the heart. It is what we ask for every time we pray, "Your kingdom come." We want our faith to be strengthened and we want other people brought to faith. God's Kingdom it is not a matter of budgets and buildings, statistics or ceremonies or services. God's kingdom is a man in India asking to be baptized even though he'll probably lose his job when others find out about his faith in Christ. God's kingdom is a father taking time to read his children a Bible story at bedtime. God's kingdom is a frail old lady who can not leave her house anymore but she reads her Meditations every morning and again at night as prays sincerely for her church and others. God's kingdom is a man in China inviting people to his apartment so he can tell them about Jesus without the authorities knowing about it. God's kingdom is a mother teaching her child to fold his hands and pray. God's kingdom is a prospect who comes to trust in Jesus and goes to heaven even though he never officially joined the church and helped their statistics. God's kingdom is a baby being baptized. God's kingdom is you listening to God's Word this morning.

God's Kingdom grows when people spend time with God's Word. Jesus explained (:26-29) that his kingdom is like a farmer planting a seed which grows into a fruitful plant. Many of you have growing gardens in your yards. You planted some seeds and they simply started growing. You did not bribe or threaten them to grow. You went about your daily life and the seeds sprouted and grew. How is that you ended up as a believer? Probably your parents or a friend or relative brought you to church, but no one forced you or programmed you to be a believer. All of you know people who were exposed to God's Word but don't care about Jesus at all. You can not force or program faith. You are a believer who comes to church because God's Word did all the work. By nature, our hearts are a barren wasteland. By nature, we don't deserve, we could not

expect, to be in God's kingdom. By nature, we were an enemy of God and would be headed to hell for all eternity. We were dead in our transgressions and sins. The only reason that you are a believer is because God's Word grew in your individual heart. What a cool thing to be touched individually by God.

The power is in God's Word. Try planting some buttons or M&Ms in your garden. You can water and fertilize them, but nothing will grow. God's Word is a powerful seed that grows God's Kingdom all by itself. Inside of a seed are the blueprints for a full-grown plant. Inside the seed of God's Word is everything you need for salvation. From God's Word grows the message of Christ crucified. Jesus was already punished for your sins so you do not have to worry about being punished by God. Your sins are forgiven. From God's Word grows the message of Christ risen so you do not have to worry about death. You will live after you die. From God's Word grows the message of Jesus ascended so you do not have to worry about anything on this earth. Jesus is watching over you and guiding everything for your good. God's Word grows God's Kingdom in our hearts. Salvation is not something we do. It is something that God gives to us through his Word. Salvation is not achieved, as in something we do. Salvation is received.

God's Word does not just give us faith, it also strengthens us on our journey through life. When we get worn out and frustrated, God's Word reminds us that God loves us and that he is still in control of things in this world and in our lives. When our minds are tempted to give into temptation, God's Word gives us the strength to walk with Jesus and fight against our sinful nature. Is your conscience nagging at you? Plant the seed. Do you need more patience with your children or grandchildren or others? Plant the seed. Do you need more love and forgiveness in your marriage. Plant the seed. Do you need more contentment in a greedy world? Plant the seed. Are you balancing on the edge of depression, almost falling into a deep darkness. Plant the seed. Are you so lonely that your heart hurts? Plant the seed.

God's Word is a tremendous gift from the Lord. May we give thanks to the Lord for his Word. May we read, learn and take it to heart. I dare say that one hour with God's Word in church each week is not enough to counteract the immorality and smut in our culture. May we rededicate ourselves to getting to church, Bible class [If you are not coming to Bible class, ask yourself why.] and reading devotions in our homes. If you are looking for good materials to help you nurture the seed of faith in your

heart, take a peek in our church library. There's a lot of good things there to read. Tune in to daily devotions from wels.net or timeofgrace.org. If God's Word is the only thing that is going to keep us connected to Jesus and eternal life in heaven, then we need to prioritize time with God's Word.

Planting God's Word is the whole purpose of our worship. Through speech, song and symbol we are simply laying God's Word upon people's hearts. That's why we don't bring in clowns and comedians to put on a show and bring more people here. We simply share God's Word. We do not know how or when the Spirit will grow things. Someone might come to church for years, but never seem to grow in his Christian living. But over those years, God's Word is working in his heart so that his faith is strong enough to hang on to Jesus in an increasingly immoral society and, who knows, some day might make a bold effort to help the kingdom work. We just keep sharing and trust that God will accomplish his saving purpose.

Just like a farmer who plants his seeds knows that there will be crops, we know that God's Word will work. God's Kingdom will grow. But like the farmer, we can not predict how much God's Kingdom will grow or who will be touched by it. We can not worry about that. We can not let ourselves get frustrated if our congregation is not as big as we would like, or if we do not see the results we want when we want them, or if we raise our children to know Jesus as their Savior, but now they don't go to church, or if we invite people to come to church and they get angry with us and don't come. We need to dedicate ourselves to sharing God's Word with as many people as we can and trust that God will bless his Word as he promised he would.

What I struggle with is that I do not share God's Word with many new people. I get so caught up with the details of maintaining this ministry that I do not do as much outreach as I should. Even when I have conversations with others in the community, I'll fail to mention Jesus. I get cold feet at times and I'm guessing you do too. We have not faithfully used all the opportunities God has given us to share his Word. We need to keep planting the seed in our own hearts to fill ourselves up with God's love. We need to remember that we are members of God's kingdom. Certainly, we are not perfect, but there is no guilt, no regret in God's kingdom. Jesus forgives us fully. Filled with his love, let us resolve to take advantage of the next opportunity God gives us. Maybe ask someone if they have a pastor who prays for them. [A lot of people say they have a

church, but they aren't really connected to it.] Maybe remind someone that Jesus loves them. Maybe ask someone if they are aware of life after death. Maybe help with our door hanging push next Saturday. Maybe give an extra offering to help missions. Do whatever you can to keep planting the seed.

Consider Jesus' kingdom during his ministry. He was a poor fellow without even his own house. His followers were 12 mostly uneducated, confused men. He was killed between two common criminals. Anyone would have guessed that the Jesus Movement would have died out as barely a footnote in world history. But then Jesus rose from the dead. Like a buried seed sprouting, Jesus came back to life and the message of his loving forgiveness and eternal life has been spreading throughout the world. Today, some 2000 years later, there are believers in every corner of the world. Can you name a company or even country that has been going strong for 2000 years? God's kingdom is still going strong all the way on the other side of the earth even here at St. Matthew in little Port Washington, WI.

Jesus compared the growth of God's kingdom to a mustard seed. (:30-32) I've read that a mustard seed is so small that it takes hundreds of seeds to weigh one gram, but when it is planted, it can grow from 10 to 15 feet high. Then the birds (which would eat dozens of such small seeds for a snack) can nest in the tree. The point of the illustration is that from something very small grows something very large. Jesus told us that his kingdom would grow from a small group of guys into a large tree that would provide shade for people throughout the world. By God's grace, we are sitting in the shade enjoying the blessings of God's love. We now get to extend the branches of God's Kingdom so that more and more are able to join us in the sure and certain hope of eternal life. We want to do all we can to get God's Word to more and more people so that the word can do its work of growing God's kingdom. Amen.