

Sunday Sermon: July 1, 2018

Sermon Text: Mark 4:26-34

Sermon Theme: The Kingdom of God

1. Easier than you think

2. Produces More than Expected

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.

Many of us are taught that anything that is worth anything requires some work to achieve. Not many people are handed the job that has lots of responsibility and lots of pay. Instead, you have to go to college to earn a degree, you have to spend time climbing the ladder in a company. Maybe you even need to have several starter jobs with other companies to get experience before you get where you need to go.

A professional athlete may be blessed with some special ability beyond you or I, but that does not carry them to the professional ranks. The endless hours of practice honing those skills and becoming the best at what they do, that's what sets them apart.

If you drive by the house that has the beautiful gardens, the owner of that house didn't get beautiful plants by simply going and buying the seeds. Instead, they spent many hours planting, weeding, tending, trimming and caring for the plants until the beautiful gardens grow.

In all of these cases it was hard work that made good things happen. Unfortunately, while hard work can drive us, the thought of hard work can also keep us from doing some things. We think about what we want to do, but then we realize that we will have to do this and that and the next thing. Soon we realize that it might take longer than we planned, maybe days, or weeks or years. If we are not committed to the idea then we won't do it.

Unfortunately, it is often the thought of hard work that keeps us from talking about our faith or engaging a friend, family member or coworker in a discussion about Jesus. We are afraid that we will get dragged into a long conversation which might be uncomfortable, a conversation which will require us to know what we believe, or a conversation where the others might know more than we do. If we are not committed to sharing Jesus with others, even the thought of hard work will keep us from sharing the good news.

But then we read the two parables that Jesus told his disciples: the Parables of the Growing Seed and the Mustard Seed. Neither of these parables is long. Neither of them is at the top of the parables that we know by heart, but the lesson that Jesus teaches through them is one that we should all take to heart. In these parables Jesus teaches that the Kingdom of God, that work of Jesus in hearts by faith, is easier than we think, and produces more than we can imagine.

In Mark 3 and 4 there are a series of events that form a chain that lead to our parables. Jesus had just begun his ministry. People are following him in great numbers. The disciples must have been in awe of all the people. Jesus tells the parable of the Sower and the Seed to illustrate that many will believe, but others will fall away. Then, he teaches us that this spreading of the seed of the Gospel is the job of his people as they let their lights shine. Finally, Jesus builds us up in our mission to share the Gospel with these two short parables. He teaches us that, through the Holy Spirit, this is the easiest work we will ever do.

Jesus began the first parable by saying, "**the Kingdom of God is like seed on the ground.**" Jesus used this phrase, *the Kingdom of God*, as a term to describe and to include the many ways he works in the hearts of those who believe. In this case, he is pointing directly at faith which the Holy Spirit works in our hearts.

Much like the Sower and the Seed, the Word is cast out into the world and also like the Sower and the Seed, the Word works. But this parable looks at the work of the farmer. Jesus shows us while the Word works,

the farmer does very little. **whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows All by itself the soil produces grain.**

One of the things that I learned early on growing up in the Midwest was just how little control the farmers had over how their plants grew. They were always complaining about something. It was too hot, too cold, too sunny, too much rain, too little rain, the growing season was too short, the growing season was too long. Even with all the advancements in farming, there was much about farming that was out of their control. And yet, even though they complained, at the end of the year there was a harvest.

In this parable, Jesus doesn't describe people coming to faith as hours of intense labor by us. He doesn't tell us we must nurture people, care for them, and make sure they grow in faith like we would plants or flowers. On the contrary, the farmer's work is fairly easy, he sows and harvests. It's the Holy Spirit who does the hard work of tending, caring and making sure faith grows in us and in others. Jesus tells us many times to share the Word and then rejoice when people hear and believe it.

As we look at the second parable we see some similar things to the first. Jesus starts with the *Kingdom of God* again, but this time compares it to a mustard seed. A mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds in nature. It doesn't look like much when we hold it in your hand. In fact, you might not even know you are holding a seed, you might think it is a speck of dirt.

The amazing part about the mustard seed is what happens after it is planted. What was once an insignificant speck of a seed becomes a tree that is big enough to give shade to people and birds a place to nest.

Jesus is teaching us another lesson. What might seem like an insignificant thing: a Gospel invitation to church, a church mailing with news of Jesus, a knock on the door with a small Gospel presentation, through these small things the Holy Spirit can and does do more to lead people to faith than we can ever expect or imagine.

Even though we know the Holy Spirit is at work, we can still be unhappy because we do the easy work of sharing the Gospel with others, but we don't see the results. We think to ourselves, I have asked this person to come to church many times and they just don't want to. I'm just wasting my breath. Or, I haven't seen any new faces since my church started knocking on doors, it's a waste of time nobody listens. Or, nobody reads those invitations we send. Nobody looks at our advertisements, why are we wasting our money on them.

The devil tempts us to think that our efforts are worthless, that we should just give up. But these parables show us we cannot give up speaking about Jesus because this easy work that the Lord gives us to do does produce in ways that we may never expect.

Take for example Jonah. Jonah thought he had hard work to do. God had told him he had to go and preach repentance to the sinful Assyrians in their capital city of Ninevah. Of all the places that God could have sent him, Jonah thought this would be hard work because the people in this sinless town would never listen.

In fact, Jonah runs the other way.

If you were calling a pastor would you choose Jonah as your first choice? If you were calling a pastor to start a church in Las Vegas and his first answer was, how do I get to New York, would that be someone that you would expect to see results from?

Jonah doesn't seem like someone who would get results. But it wasn't about Jonah it was about God and the Holy Spirit working through the Word. After the fish spit him out, Jonah finally goes and does what he is supposed to do. But even though he goes, we do not see a picture of someone who is happy to be doing this work. He goes into the city on the first day and proclaims judgment on the sinful. And what happens..... they listen and Jonah is angry about it.

In Jonah, we can see ourselves. There are many times that we have opportunities to share the Gospel with other people but we simply don't do. The work is too hard, the situation too difficult, the person just not right. The work is just too hard to do. We are not committed to it. We would rather run the other way than take a moment to share Jesus.

But in these parables, we see the same promise of mercy and grace that God showed to Ninevah. The Word goes out and it works. The Holy Spirit works through the Word to bring faith to people's hearts.

We need that message of a Savior from sin just as much as those Ninevites did and just as much as anyone else does. We need to know that this Savior does not damn us to hell. Instead he forgives us and saves us. He includes us in his work of sharing the message and forgives us when we think the work is too hard and fail to do it.

We are part of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is at work in our hearts so that even now we are ready to share that Word with others.

This message of Jesus' love and forgiveness is one that many others need to hear as well. Somewhere along the way God has blessed us with someone who has shared with us this Good News. We should be that for someone else.

The work is not hard: we witness, God does the rest. He promises that our work of sharing the Gospel will never be insignificant. We may not see the results, but he will.

Let none hear you idly saying, there is nothing I can do, while the souls of men are dying and the master calls for you, take the task he gives you gladly, let his work your pleasure be, answer quickly when he calleth Here am I send me send me. Lord give us such a heart to do your work. Amen.