

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – June 17, 2018

Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Mark 4:26-29

He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27) Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 28) All by itself the soil produces grain--first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. 29) As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." (NIV)

GOD GIVES POWER TO HIS WORD

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, dear friends,

Several years ago in southern Illinois, a man decided to plant an asparagus bed next to his house. In the fall, he dug up the bed and put in the roots. In the spring, nothing came up. That summer the bed had nothing but weeds. He mulched the bed again in the fall, and decided to give it one more year. But, the following spring there were no signs of growth from any asparagus plant. So he gave up. Later that summer he decided to expand his driveway over the so-called asparagus patch. He put in six inches of crushed rock and three inches of asphalt for a solid driveway.

The following spring, however, he could hardly believe his eyes. The hardened asphalt was cracking and asparagus plants were pushing themselves right through the rock and asphalt! He was the proud owner of an asparagus driveway!

I've never had an experience quite like that but I'm always amazed at the power of the seeds I plant in my garden. Like many of the gardens in our area the soil is clay – it's not the easiest to work up and sometimes after the seeds are planted the sun bakes the ground pretty good. Even though there's a crust of hardened clay on the surface somehow or another the tiny sprouts crack through the soil and work their way to the surface.

In I Peter 1:23 the apostle writes, "**For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.** (NIV)" Just as God has given great power to a wheat seed or an asparagus root, so he has also endowed His Word with great power. Jesus teaches that truth to us through the parable of the seed growing secretly. It is a truth important for both pastor and congregation to know and believe.

Jesus tells about a farmer who scatters seed on the ground, Perhaps, you have scattered seed in your garden or on your lawn -- little brown, dry seeds. How do they grow into something that is tender and green? The simple act of sowing seed gives the Lord of life an opportunity to show you a miracle of His power.

The farmer sows his seed, and he trusts in the God of creation, who endowed plants with the ability to reproduce after their kind, to cause the plant to sprout and grow. Jesus says that the farmer who sows his seed may not understand how it all works, but he knows that when seed is scattered, God causes it to grow.

The "seed" of which Jesus speaks in the parable is the Word of God that gave us new life, as the apostle Peter also explained (see above). Whenever I or someone else preaches the Word of God, we are sowing seed. When our Sunday School teachers share the Bible lessons, they sow the seed of the Gospel. Whenever you share a truth about Jesus love with your children or parents or friends or coworkers, you are sowing seed.

Many farmers are very smart. I've known farmers who are skilled in genetics, economics, animal husbandry, and many other fields. But the farmer does not need to understand how seeds grow in order to have a good crop. He just needs to sow the seed to be successful and to have an opportunity for a harvest.

There's a lesson for me. There may be a lot about human nature I don't understand. There may be a lot of things that I could explore, but this one thing is sure: if I don't sow the seed of God's Word, if I don't get out there and tell people about Jesus, I cannot expect to reap a harvest. The same is true for any other pastor.

There's also a lesson for you. Parents -- how do you want your children to turn out? Do you want them to be honest, kind, faithful, generous, respectful, diligent, and pure? If so, then understand that if you want that to be the harvest, you need to sow the seed in the hearts of your children. There may be many things about child behavior you don't understand. You may have many shortcomings in parenting, but this much we can learn: Unless we teach our children the word of God, we cannot expect to reap a harvest of righteousness.

Are you concerned about someone you love and hopeful that they will spend eternity with you in heaven? Then you've got to use the tools the Holy Spirit has provided – the Means of Grace – the Gospel. In other words you have to share the Word – sow the seed!

The farmer sows the seed. He knows that he must sow if there is to be any growth, any harvest. Christian pastors, teachers, parents, and witnesses sow the seed of the Gospel. If we don't, how will there be any growth? And when the time for harvesting comes, how will there be something to harvest?

When the farmer scatters the seed on the ground, he may wonder if it will be a waste of time. Will the hard, dry brown, shriveled things actually grow? The farmer cannot make the seed grow. He cannot force it. He must be patient, and let the seed do its work, for God has put power into the seed, power for growth.

When the preacher spends hours preparing the sermons and Bible classes, will it be a waste of time? When the teacher faithfully prepares her lesson and teaches the Sunday School class, will it really have an impact? When the father reaches for the devotion book after supper, will the sharing of God's word make a difference in the lives of his children? When we turn off the TV and pick up the Bible, will the quiet time of meditation in God's word accomplish anything?

Oh, yes, Jesus says. The seed will do its thing. God has put power into his word. It is "**living and enduring**", Peter says. It is "**sharper than any two-edged sword**", Paul says.

I'm sure you've heard the well known phrase of the statesman: "The pen is mightier than the sword" – he knew the power of man's words. Some of you might remember the pop-rock group known as "The Carpenters?" It was a brother and sister duo who produced a series of hit songs in the early 70's. Richard would produce the songs, and Karen would sing them beautifully. When she was 15 years old, one song critic referred to Karen as "Richard's chubby sister." A few years later, Karen tragically died of anorexia, brought on by an obsession to be thin. The power our words have!

God's words have greater power. His word has the power to break the hold of sin on a human heart. It has the power to bring a person to believe in things he cannot see, to accept things that are not reasonable, and to put hope in things that are beyond this life. God's word has the power to break through spiritual darkness, stubbornness, ignorance, and to bring a soul to the truth. God's word has the power to break through sinful habits and change a life. God's word has the power to bring a tiny baby to faith in Jesus.

If you or I have ever doubted the importance of being in the word of God, listen carefully to this parable. The seed grows. We may not understand how. But when it is sown, it grows.

There was a man who distributed Gospel tracts for many years on a street corner. Finally, seeing no visible results, he gave up. When he returned to the same spot two years later, he saw another individual handing out Gospel leaflets as he had once done. Striking up a conversation, he discovered that the man had become a Christian through a tract he had received on that corner about two years before. The convert added, "Many times I've come back here to find that earnest worker and thank him, but he never returned. I decided he must have died, and so I've taken his place!" The first man suddenly realized that his work had not been in vain. Much encouraged he went back to giving out tracts the very next day.

When Elizabeth Barrett became the wife of Robert Browning, her parents disowned her because they disapproved of the marriage. The daughter, however, wrote almost every week, telling them that she loved them and longed for a reconciliation. After 10 years, she received a huge box in the mail that contained all the notes she had sent. Not one had been opened! Although these "love letters" have become an invaluable part of classical English literature, it's really pathetic to think that they were never read by Elizabeth Barrett's parents. Had they looked at just one, the broken relationship with their daughter might have been healed.

All of us are alienated from God because of sin. We've separated ourselves from him. He has provided a way of reconciliation. In the Bible He tells about it and expresses His earnest longing for fellowship with us. God's word is wonderful and powerful. Let's learn from Jesus that we need to be sowing it. And let's trust that when we do, it will accomplish what God sent it to do. Amen.