

June 14, 2015

St. Mark 4:26-34: ***“His Seed, His Kingdom, His Growth!”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Jesus says, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? 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." Our Lord uses a mustard seed to help us understand the kingdom of God. The characteristic feature of the mustard seed is its very small size. It is rather insignificant in comparison with other seeds as it is sown into the ground. The results, however, are incredible. In the proper soil, and with the right conditions, it will grow up to be the largest of the garden vegetables, becoming almost treelike in its size. In Israel, it can grow ten to fifteen feet!

This amazing mustard seed is about the miracle of the kingdom of God on earth. Like the mustard seed, the preaching of the Gospel of Christ is considered insignificant in the eyes of the world. The word of Scripture is despised in the sight of those who prefer to follow after vain philosophy and the wisdom of men. But the result of the insignificant preaching of the Gospel is astounding. It produces what looks like a tree, extending its branches in every direction, so that the birds will come into its shade and be glad to use the protection of the branches. Who are the birds making nests in its shade?

The birds, making nests in the shade of the treelike plant that grew from a small mustard seed, are the people of this unbelieving world who benefit from the shade of the tree. It says in Proverbs 11:10, "When it goes well with the righteous (the people of God), the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish there are shouts of joy." In Proverbs 29:2 we read, "When the righteous increase (those who believe in Christ who is our righteousness), the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan." Whether the unbelieving world wants to acknowledge it or not, the growth of the kingdom of God is always of great benefit to the people of this world, but when the righteous perish from a land, the tree begins to wither and everything changes. That is why the Proverbs say that "the people groan."

It is interesting to note that as we get closer to the coming of Jesus that this unbelieving world will become globally united in its hope to remove Biblical truth with those who believe and live it. There will come a point in time where, for all practical purposes, it will appear that Biblical truth and Bible believing Christians will be finally defeated and eradicated. It says in Revelation 11:10, "and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them [The Bible and Bible believing Christians] and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth." But we should not lose heart. It goes on to say, "But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them."

In the meantime, the Kingdom of God grows, rapidly from time to time, but mostly it has grown gradually. At the end it will appear to be fading away forever. But, wherever it grows, it provides shade for everyone in many and various ways. Oddly enough, despite the shade, despite all the good that it brings, the kingdom of God is constantly met with opposition. The devil is its enemy, and the unbelieving world attacks it even though it enjoys the shade. Yes, this unbelieving world likes the shade, but the message of repentance and new life is never a popular message to them because it requires all to bear the

fruits of sorrow over sin and faith in Christ. It requires all to struggle against sin and overcome the sinful desires of the flesh. In other words, this unbelieving world likes the shade of Christ, but it wants the shade without Jesus, it wants to indulge in sinful desires by performing evil works at the same time. They want the best of both worlds. But, the truth is found in these words of Christ: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other."

The Christian will struggle with sin, die to sin, and overcome it. The Christian does not believe that Jesus died for our sins so that we can indulge in sin until we get to heaven. And yet, many Christians today tend to go that route. There are many who want to indulge in their wicked desires with God's blessing and the promise of everlasting life. Paul writes in Romans 8:12-13, "So then, we are debtors, not to the [sinful] flesh, to live according to the [sinful] flesh. For if you live according to the [sinful] flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." And if anyone has been living this delusional lifestyle and repents, we have the words of John, "But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

It is nothing short of miraculous that we are here today and that there is a Church on earth. It is true what our Gospel lesson says: "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and 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. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come (Mark 4:26-29)." Let us ever forget, it is **His Seed, His Kingdom, His Growth!** We know not how! But one thing is for sure: it is not because of us or anything we have done. The most that can be said is that he uses us to sow the seed of his word. It is a great honor and privilege to be his servants and to be able to speak about all he has done!

The Word of God grows. Despite enemies from within and without, despite the way it will appear right before the coming of Jesus, the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. Babies are being baptized and made children of God. The pure Word of God is being proclaimed. The body and blood of the Lord is given. Sins are confessed and forgiven. And though it is impossible with us, there is a harvest being prepared. The Word of God and the Sacraments are working and carrying out the purpose for which God sent them - **His Seed, His Kingdom, His Growth!**

We need to not only hear this truth, but we need to take it to heart so that we do not lose hope because as we get closer to the end it will feel as if all is lost. If we look to ourselves and if it is left up to us to grow his kingdom and even defend it and the Word, we will despair because we cannot even take care of ourselves. The seductive ways of unbelievers are too powerful for us to face alone. The deceptive voice of Satan is the loudest voice out there. Our sinful flesh is just too constant. Like I just said, we cannot even defend and protect ourselves by our own strength. How then can we expect to defend and protect the Church? It must be left up to the powerful and miraculous Word of God and Sacraments.

Since the apostolic times there has never been a greater pastor or more faithful witness to the Gospel than Martin Luther. When asked how he, one single man, could accomplish the Reformation, he replied,

“I did nothing, God did it all. While my friend Amsdorf and I sat around and drank Wittenberg beer, the Word did it! I did nothing; the Word did everything!” I don’t know if there still exists a recipe for Luther’s Wittenberg beer, but the Word is still with us to this day! The question is what are we going to do with it. Are we going to hide our light, or are we going to let it shine for all the world to see?

Like Luther we have the Word and so we do not lose heart. Though our sinful flesh, this unbelieving world, and the ravings of the devil are hard to face, we have the words of Paul in our epistle lesson: “While we groan here for a while, while we are burdened here for a while, we are to always be of good courage for God has given us his Holy Spirit.” Indeed, the Holy Spirit speaks of Jesus and guarantees that our sins are forgiven. The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. So, we do not lose hope because it is not left into our hands. It is **His Seed, His Kingdom, His Growth.**

The prophet Ezekiel that gives us a beautiful picture of this powerful working of God. Listen to what he says in our Old Testament lesson:

Thus says the Lord GOD: “I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.” (Ezekiel 17:22-24)

While we invite people to church and Bible Investigation Class, while we speak and sing of our Lord’s work as faithful servants, we must never forget the parable of the mustard seed and the mystery of the seed scattered on the ground. It is His work, not ours - His word, not ours - His power, not ours - His kingdom, not ours! All other kingdoms of this world, all other so called trees will dry up and die. But not his kingdom. His kingdom is forever!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott