

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Amen.

²⁶ 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.”

³⁰ Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. ³² 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.”

³³ With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. ³⁴ He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything. **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Friends,

What picture comes to mind when you hear the word, “kingdom?” Do you think of the ruler of a kingdom such as a king or queen? Do you think of a castle or a throne? Do you wonder how large is this kingdom? Maybe you think of imaginary kingdoms found in fairy tales or the “Magic Kingdom” found at Disney. In a way, the concept of a kingdom is foreign to us because it’s not a way we refer to countries in our modern world.

When Jesus lived in this world there were kings and there were kingdoms. That was a common concept and so Jesus used this concept to describe the Kingdom of God. As we consider this portion of scripture, we want to see what Jesus meant when he said, “**The Kingdom of God is Like...**” The first picture Jesus uses to describe the Kingdom of God are, “**The Seeds that are Planted,**” and the second picture he uses are, “**The Mustard Seed that Grows.**”

I. What is the Kingdom of God? Very simply put, the Kingdom of God is not a place but an activity. It is the activity of the Gospel being proclaimed. It is the activity of the gospel producing faith in people’s hearts. It is the activity of Christ ruling in the hearts of all believers; in our hearts. That was hard for the disciples to understand. They wanted the Kingdom of God to be a place. The only activity they were looking for was an overthrow of the Roman government and God establishing his physical kingdom here on earth. The disciples had their own ideas of what the Kingdom of God should be like and how Jesus should establish this kingdom.

That’s why Jesus began this section of parables with the word “Listen!” Listen to what I am going to tell you – it’s important! Matthew and Mark each recorded some of the parables spoken that day and these parables all focused on the Kingdom of God.

Both Matthew and Mark begin with the **Parable of the Sower** (Mark 4:3-20) where Jesus teaches us how God’s Word goes out and how it is received. In the **Parable of the Hidden Treasure and Priceless Pearl** (Matthew 13:44-46) Jesus teaches us the value of being in the Kingdom of God. Citizenship in God’s Kingdom is the most valuable thing in our lives. In the

Parable of the Net (Matthew 13:47-50) Jesus teaches us to cast out the net of the Gospel and leave the sorting or judging to God. That brings us to the parables before us this morning (Mark 4:26-34). Jesus uses these two parables to emphasize the power of the Gospel.

In the first parable we have the picture of a person scattering seed on the ground. The seed is the Gospel – the Good News found in God’s Word. The Gospel message is stated in a number of different ways: An example might be the jailer in Philippi who asked Paul what must he do to be saved, Paul answered, **“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.”** (Acts 16:31). Jesus himself said, **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.”** (Mark 16:16). My favorite is, **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** (2 Corinthians 5:21). The message of the gospel is simple. Christ has done it all. He paid for everyone of our sins. Faith alone in Christ alone and all that he has done for our salvation saves.

Why do we need the gospel? **“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 6:23) Our sins only bring us death. We can’t save ourselves. But God gives us the gift of life through faith in Jesus as our Savior. We are sinners – we have disobeyed God and continue to do so every day. Sometimes we don’t even realize the sins we have committed. Without the gospel we are lost and condemned sinners but the gospel brings Jesus into our lives. The gospel heals our sins. The gospel reveals God’s great love for us. That is why the Gospel message is at the center of our worship.

But so many don’t even know that they need the gospel and so God has given us – his people – the privilege to share the gospel with our words and with our actions. That is what Jesus was getting at when he said, **“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.”** We can’t always see the result of our Words and actions – we can’t always see the results of proclaiming the gospel but we shouldn’t worry about that because God takes care of the results.

When it comes to sharing the Gospel, the Apostle Paul tells us, **“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”** (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). God makes the seed grow. The results rest with God and He assures us, **“so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”** (Isaiah 55:11). God is the one that works through the Word.

Have you ever tried to grow anything? I have and I have to admit I’m not always so good at it. A few years ago I tried to grow tomatoes in big pots on my patio. I read about how the container had to be large enough and how they had to get enough sunlight and water. But even though I had prepared, I still had to rely on God to send warm weather and sunshine and rain.

Sharing the Gospel is the same way. We prepare ourselves by coming to church to hear the Word and by attending Bible Study to learn more and ask questions. Then we look for the opportunities that God gives us and when we find them, and God will give us plenty of them, we take them. We throw out the seeds of God’s Word. Then we leave it in God’s hands and he uses our efforts to help the Kingdom of God to grow. That takes us to the second parable in this

portion of scripture – The Parable of the Mustard seed. This parable illustrates the power of the Gospel as seen in the growth of the Kingdom of God.

II. The Apostle Paul tells us that before Pentecost the church numbered about 120 souls (Acts 1:15). That's not very many compared even to the world population at that time. But look what happened on Pentecost. About 3000 were added to the number of believers in one day. What an awesome display of the power of the Word. And it didn't stop there. People went out from Jerusalem and told their friends what they had heard and the Word worked and the number of believers grew.

The Christian Church today is huge, numbering in the millions of souls and it all started with 120 believers 2000 years ago. They didn't have television or the internet or mass mailing campaigns. They just had word-of-mouth and shared the Gospel one-to-one.

It's easy for us to think that we don't make a difference. That talking to one person about Jesus won't really matter considering the millions of people out there in the world. But consider this: One day there was a man walking along a beach. In the distance he saw what looked like a person dancing on the beach. As he got closer, he saw that it was a young man and he wasn't dancing. Instead he was reaching down and picking up something and very gently throwing it into the ocean.

As he got closer he called out, "Good morning! What are you doing?" The young man paused and replied, "Throwing starfish into the ocean." So he asked, "Why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?" His reply, "The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in they'll die." He said, "But young man, don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and starfish all along it. You can't possibly make a difference." The young man listened politely and then bent down and picked up another starfish and threw it into the sea and said, "It made a difference to that one."

Sharing Jesus with just one person does make a difference. It can rescue them from certain death and bring the gift of eternal life. It can add their name to the multitude of names written in the Book of Life. It gives us the opportunity to share the joy and the peace and the comfort that comes to us through God's Word with someone else. What a wonderful privilege God has given us by allowing us to talk about our Savior.

Today, as we think about these parables, remember that you are part of the Kingdom of God. You believe in Jesus as your Savior. The seed of the gospel has been planted in your heart and the God's Word has changed your life. Through the gospel you have freedom from your sins because the good news is that we are forgiven. Through the gospel you receive the comforting words of our God that we are never alone in this world and when we are weak, we can rely on his strength. When we are sad, we can rely on his comfort. When we are lost we can look to him for guidance. Through the gospel we have the sure hope of heaven.

May we rejoice that the seed of faith has been planted in our hearts. May we take the opportunity to gather around the Word and sacrament so that the Holy Spirit can water our faith and keep it strong and may we be faithful witnesses in our words and actions so the seed of the gospel continues to go out and the God's Kingdom continues to grow. Amen.