

SERMON FOR JUNE 16, 2018

TEXT: MARK 4:26-29

THEME: THE WORD WORKS!

And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

In the name of Jesus:

Growing up in Cleveland, I had no idea what a farm was. I had heard and read about farms and farmers in school, but I had no exposure to farming. That changed when I was in Seminary and became a vicar. A vicar is a student pastor, one who in the 3rd year of Seminary training goes to a place to learn the craft of shepherding souls.

God, in His wisdom, sent me to a little town called Red Bud, Illinois, about 30 miles or so southeast of St. Louis. It was a town of 2600 people, and the congregation I served had 1300 members, so half of the town belonged to the church. And most of the members were farmers. The town was so small that it didn't have a McDonalds, it did, though, have a stoplight. One stop light, that constantly blinked on and off. If you were to blink you would miss the little town of Red Bud, where most of the townspeople were Lutheran and many made their living as farmers.

One elderly couple in the congregation took Luann and I under their wing. Luann and I were not married at the time; she lived in St. Louis, as she was a grad student at Washington University in St. Louis about an hour away. When we got together it was usually during the weekend, and when she came down to visit she met Paul and Melba Busse, a delightful farming couple who lived just outside of Red Bud.

Luann grew up on a farm, but as for me, I had no idea what a farm looked like. Paul and Melba changed that, as Paul would have me over to show me his new equipment and try to introduce me to the lifestyle of a farmer. The Busses grew corn and raised hogs, they even offered Luann and I a chance to slaughter a hog, but we respectfully declined. But my eyes were opened that year to the life of a farmer and the faith of the farmer.

Paul taught me that there was a lot of work going into being a farmer, there were fields to plow, seed to plant, then harvest, and equipment to continually repair. Paul taught me that the farmer had to rely on the Lord for the increase and for the harvest. The farmer could prepare the ground, plant the seed, apply herbicides to get rid of the weeds, but when it came time for the crops to grow, well, that was out of the farmer's hands. He had to then rely on the good Lord to get the crops to grow.

It is no wonder, then, that the Lord Jesus compares the work of the Church to that of a farmer. Earlier in Mark chapter 4 Jesus told the Parable of the Sower to the large crowd gathered around Him. Here, later in Mark chapter 4, Jesus continues to teach about what the Kingdom of God is like, in the Parable of the Growing Seed. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus explains why not everyone who hears the Gospel believes it and lives according to the Word. The reason is that the seed fall on different types of soil, but the seed, that is, the Word of God, accomplishes God's good and gracious will when and where it pleases the Holy Spirit. Here, though, in our text for today, Jesus makes an entirely different point. Listen now as Jesus speaks:

And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed automatically sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

Jesus is the Man who plants His Word in the hearts and lives of His people. Jesus has planted His Word in your heart and in your life, in your Baptism, when you go to the Lord’s Supper, and when you read and hear the Word of God. Just like a farmer, who after he plants the seed into his fields will go to sleep and rise again, night and day, and that seed that is planted will automatically sprout and grow into an abundant crop at the harvest, so also the Word of God works automatically in your life. There is much that the farmer doesn’t know about how the seed grows, there is really nothing he can do about it, except wait for the seed to mature, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain to be harvested. All the farmer does is wait and rely on the Lord to provide the growth needed for the harvest. Such is the life of the Christian. Jesus has planted His Word in your heart, so that the Word, where it is planted, will automatically grow so that God lives and rules in your heart and life until the Day when you see God face to face.

God has done this and is doing this today. He promised as much throughout the Old Testament. Just listen to what Ezekiel says in our Old Testament lesson for today: 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. ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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.”

God the Father in love chose His Son, Jesus, to be your Savior. Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, was born for you, to save you from sin, Satan, and death. Jesus was crucified high upon Calvary’s cross. On that dreadful Day the sky turned black and the earth quaked as the Father damned His only begotten Son for your sins and mine. And God raised His Son from death to life giving victory over sin, Satan, and death for all who believe in Him. For there is no other Name under heaven where a person can be saved except the Name of Jesus.

God wills that all be saved and come to a saving faith in Jesus. To that end He sends our His Word to proclaim hope to the hopeless, forgiveness to those captive in sin, and eternal life to those are haunted by the shadow of death. God brings life to those who are dead by the power of His Word. At creation God spoke and brought into being creation. He spoke His Word to a lump of clay, and breathed into Adam and his children the breath of life. When God speaks, when His Word goes out from His mouth, He creates life and gives life.

God commands that you seek the Lord where He can be found, that you call upon Him while He is near. He calls sinners to forsake their wicked ways and turn to the Lord in repentance and live. His ways are not our ways; His thoughts are not our thoughts.

God relies not on our wisdom, strength, or reason, but He works through His Almighty and all-powerful Word. The prophet Isaiah writes: ““Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.¹⁰ “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

God works through His Word. Do you desire to have a stronger faith in Jesus? God works through His Word. Do you want those around you to believe in Jesus as their Savior? God works through His Word. Do you want God to speak to you today? God works through His Word. Do you want to see the Church grow and be fruitful in its mission work and purpose in bringing sinners to faith in Christ? God works through His Word!

You see, my friends, it is all really pretty simple. God attaches Himself to His Word and changes sinners lives through His Word and by the power of His Word. His Word is living and active. Whenever God’s Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or meditated upon, then God is at work in that person to bring them to faith in Jesus and to use that person to the glory of God.

Martin Luther learned this truth and relied on the power of the Word of God in His life. Luther wrote about this when he said: "After I preach my sermon on Sunday,

when I return home, I drink my little glass of Wittenberg beer and I just let the gospel run its course." You see, Luther learned to rely on God's Word, for the Word works! Luther didn't have any fancy program to change the world during the Reformation; there weren't any policies or procedures he passed in a Board meeting. Luther simply preached the Word, and let the Word of God work. His sermons, his teachings, his life got its power from the Lord Jesus Christ working through the Word. Only the Holy Spirit, working through the Word, can change a person, the Church, and the world. Luther learned to rely on the Word, for the Word works!

That is God's promise to you. His Word works. So let the Word work. Read, mark, study, inwardly digest and meditate upon Christ and His Word. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly; devote yourself and your life to God's Word. For blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.

Amen