

Sermon Mark 4:26-34 *“The Power of the Seed”*

This morning, we are going to learn more about when God walks among us and what Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of Heaven, relating to a couple of parables from this morning’s scripture. If we go back a couple of chapters in Mark’s gospel, one of Jesus’s first recorded words is in chapter 1, verse 15. Listen as I read: **“The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”** What takes place in the opening chapters of Mark’s Gospel is amazingly exciting. Here is the impact of the king in his Kingdom when he walks among us. Demons fear and flee, sicknesses are healed. The oppressed are set free, and that is what happens when heaven touches earth. As Jesus teaches, the crowd hangs on his every word. He offers forgiveness to the paralyzed man, and the crowds say they have never seen anything like this. He invites tax collectors and sinners to eat with him, and he asks them to follow him, and they do. Everything is sailing along so well, and the kingdom has come, but then, as we learned last week in Chapter 3, there is a problem. The authorities begin to rise in opposition to Jesus. He can no longer teach in the synagogue, and as the crowds follow Jesus around, his family questions his sanity.

As we move to chapter four, we witness the disciples wrestling with their doubts and uncertainties about their mission. They long for a clear, unmistakable sign that the future unmistakably belongs to the Kingdom of God. This is why Jesus imparts these mysterious parables. His disciples need to internalize the belief that the word of God, as preached by Jesus, will thrive and triumph, leading to the Kingdom of God. But what about those in the crowds, pushing forward to touch Him? These individuals in the crowds are not yet disciples of Jesus. Let us listen to Jesus’s words to His disciples, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside, everything is said in parables so that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise, they might turn and be forgiven!” This stark contrast between the disciples and the crowd is a touching reminder of the exclusivity of the disciples’ knowledge and the importance of their role in spreading the word of God.

These parables serve as powerful tools, inviting people to listen, to take a closer look, to see how God is responding in the world through Jesus, and to discover the kingdom of God. The Parable of the Growing Seed is the parable of parables, for Jesus says, “Don’t you understand this parable? How, then, will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the Word, the seed of the Kingdom. **Hold that thought.** Parable one is about how the seed grows secretly. This means that you shouldn’t underestimate the power of the “Word.” Parable two is about the mustard seed and how the kingdom triumphs. Let’s see what the text has to offer for us, but first, let’s pray.

**Father, your kingdom is like a tiny seed. When we look at your church and our lives, we see smallness, weakness, and insignificance. When you look at us, you see potential, growth, and significance. Give us eyes of faith and willing hands to see your Kingdom grow in us. In the name of Your Son Jesus and the power of the Spirit, we commit to you again. Amen.**

In parable one, the farmer broadcasts the seed night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, and the seed sprouts and grows even though he does not know how. Here, we see the farmer's faithfulness in scattering the seed far and wide as he walks up and down his fields. A biblical image not so much in modern farming with all our modern machinery, but one still evident in other parts of the world. I think of the image of BBC News, broadcasting the seed of world news in the broader sense, not narrow-casting news. The farmer in the parable is doing precisely the same thing by scattering the seed, broadcasting, not narrow-casting. Why? Does he not care where the seed lands? Let's think about this for a moment.

So much of our evangelism over the generations has been narrow-casting, plowing the same tracts over and over. We have not wandered too far from home. Throughout generations, frankly, the message from the church has been saying to the community, "You come get it." However, the lesson from Jesus' parable is quite the opposite. He says, "You go spread it!" Jesus believed in outreach, whereas the church has continued to operate quite the opposite in an attempt to draw people in.

Brothers and sisters, lean in a bit closer and listen to what I am about to say. The days of narrow-casting are over. Let me repeat. The days of narrow-casting are over. This is the age of broad-casting because people are no longer going to be reached through conventional methods. In this age of a secular world, people **are not going** to come into the church, at least not at first. People outside the church find our structure and traditions strange, as well as our society, as you well know. People are starting much further back; therefore, we must get out there scattering the seed far and wide.

Generations far and wide are growing up with the good news of the gospel with limited contact with Christianity. We have to build relationships and listen to their questions before people will learn to trust us. But let us remember **the context** of why Jesus is telling this story, for the farmer is **not casual** in his approach, not at all, for he is confident in the power of the seed to germinate and grow wherever it falls. If we are **to be** his disciples, that is what we must come to realize, and that is what we must change. Don't panic, friends, for Jesus says, "sow faithfully." Believe in the power of God's Word, and use every opportunity, like the farmer, to scatter the seed. That is how the kingdom grows.

In the text, Jesus does not mention any soil or climatic conditions for the seed to grow. Gee Whiz, the farmer, is asleep most of the time. All by itself, the seed sprouts and grows, and the more we see God at work in people, the more mysterious it appears. Our job is to sow the seed faithfully. How many times have I heard people say to ideas: "That won't work." If you are saying to yourself, "What chance does this parable have for us" in this grand play? Jesus says this is the way my kingdom grows. Jesus has confidence in the triumph of His Word, but do we? That is where the power is, not in us, but in the Word. So, we had better make sure we sow the truth, for if the message gets lost, it becomes fluffy entertainment. The lesson for us is this: Do not underestimate

the *power of the seed*. What about the second parable, a new subject introducing the Parable of the Mustard Seed? Not mustard seeds, but a mustard seed.

The smallest grain of a mustard seed is so tiny that it is hard to see, yet it produces a huge plant. Jesus proceeds to describe the Kingdom of God as a mustard seed. Again, neither the climate nor the soil is specified. We are taught first, as in the growth of crops, so in the work of grace, there must be someone to spread the seed. Good friend and colleague Dr. Rev. Meagan Boozer has reminded me on many occasions that big things begin with small things and that there is much that is beyond our human comprehension and control. The growth is up to God, for he is the one who gives the increase, and He is the one in control. How, then, should we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable should we present it?

Jesus presents the kingdom that will regrow over time until one day it is the most incredible Kingdom in the world. But it will take time, and that is the picture that Jesus depicts.

I believe undoubtedly that when the disciples heard Jesus describe the kingdom of God, they had visions of a global empire in a palace with a majestic military king sitting upon a throne. Then came the shock. “The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed.” Say what? How is that possible? However, the point lies in the contrast between the size of the seed when it is sown and the size of the plant when it is grown. **To you, my friends, Jesus says, have been given the mystery** of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside receive everything in parables. Remember, from last week, Jesus received an accusation of being Satan. Most of those whom Jesus heard his teaching rejected his truth, those who were unbelievers. At this moment, his teaching was to convey it to those for whom it is intended: those who have good ears to hear.

The mustard seed is so tiny that it would take nearly twenty-one thousand seeds to make one ounce. One seed can produce a plant up to 10-15 feet tall and 6 feet wide. The only modern crop plant in existence with smaller seeds than mustard is tobacco, and this plant of American origin was not grown in the old world until the sixteenth century. No one could see what that tiny seed Jesus was sowing would become. God can take someone who seems insignificant and make something great out of them! He can take a little red-headed boy nobody wanted on their team and make him a great leader of men. He did that with Winston Churchill. He takes a backward, stuttering man and uses him to bring the Law of God to humanity. He did that with Moses.

He can take an awkward, shy shoe salesperson and use him to shake the world for Jesus. He did that with a newborn baby who grew up as a carpenter’s son, eventually speaking to small groups of people who came to listen, and the truth of God’s kingdom began to grow.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed is one of encouragement and hope. The disciples may have wondered whether it was worthwhile to sow the seed of the Kingdom at all. Our Lord followed up with these two parables about the difficulties and discouragement of Christian work, with these two about the encouragements and glorious results of kingdom work—first, the parable of the fruit-bearing earth and the seed growing secretly.

The second parable is about the mustard seed, which, from tiny beginnings, developed and grew until the seed became more significant than all the herbs in the garden. Jesus meant to teach the disciples not to despise the day of small things, for in all things, the Kingdom of God, as they saw it now, would become unlike anything they could ever anticipate.

The growth of the kingdom is under God's control, and one of the many problems in modern-day ministry reigns under the sign of secularization, meaning that the church belongs to specific people or the senior pastor. **Oh, that is so-and-so's church.** Responsibility and glory do not belong to either the pastor or any particular individual. Glory all too seldom goes to the only one who deserves it: God. Throughout scripture, God chose the weak and the outcast through whom to bring greatness.

In closing, it was not the great king Saul but a small shepherd boy by the name of David who defeated Goliath and the Philistines. The first disciples were a band of social misfits. The apostle Paul says, "I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses" because God's power is made perfect in weakness. We do our best when we rely entirely on God, for we are part of God's kingdom work. The progress and greatness of his kingdom and our ministry are under his sovereign control. Big things have small beginnings. The word of God contains the germ of life, which, given the suitable soil, will produce life by itself. Brothers and sisters, if you have the desire "to be" disciples of Jesus Christ and then go out and joyfully proclaim him, never underestimate **the power of the seed**. So, friends, now that you have heard the good news, how ready are you to go sow some seeds? Amen.