

Pentecost 3 / June 13, 2021

Mark 4:26

“The kingdom of God is as if a man should cast seed on the ground.”

Jesus' parables often liken the kingdom of God to processes in the natural world. Today's parable likens the growth of God's kingdom in the human heart to the sowing of seed, germination, growth and harvest. One seed sown in the ground has the potential to produce an exponential number of seeds. The largest trees in the forest began as tiny seeds. Seed is sown intentionally by human agents and randomly by forces of nature. Jesus frames His parable in terms of a man intentionally casting seed on the ground, but in the natural world seed is spread by the wind, or carried by birds. Consider the trees clinging to mountain peaks! Who sowed those seeds and who fertilizes the soil to provide sufficient nutrients for life? Nature is amazing in its ability to recreate itself through the spreading of seeds and sustain itself through the fertility of the earth. God's kingdom is similar to the natural world in its power to sustain itself and to spread throughout the earth. Similar, but greater in power, purpose and majesty!

Consider the Holy Spirit, who through the word creates faith unseen in the hardness of the human heart, where the word finds no natural soil good for planting; and we all know that good soil is an essential element in germination and growth. The Holy Spirit is the Great Gardener of the human soul. He germinates faith and produces a harvest of life in the most unlikely of places, our souls. He continually weeds out what is bad through the law. He constantly reseeds our souls with the finest seed, the gospel of forgiveness in Christ Jesus. He refreshes our spirits with the water of baptism. He nourishes our faith, gives it growth and makes it strong with the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion. In this sacred meal we receive forgiveness, spiritual nutrition and a foretaste of the feast to come, when God raises us and all believers in the harvest of everlasting life and brings us fully into His kingdom, body and soul.

Jesus likened the kingdom of God to processes in the natural world, especially agricultural practices. He did this not simply because He spoke to an agrarian society. He spoke in this way, because the same power behind the forces of nature is the force behind the kingdom of God. The forces of nature are the power of God at work in the natural world. What the world calls “Mother Nature” is the Spirit of God renewing the face of the earth; causing “grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate that he may bring forth food from the earth.” The Psalmist sang, “You send forth your Spirit and you renew the face of the earth.” Again, the Psalmist sang, “You open your hand and you satisfy the desire of every living thing.” We acknowledge this whenever we pray “Give us this day our daily bread.” There is no Mother Nature. There is only the Father God; who sends His Spirit to renew the face of the earth and who gave His eternal Son to be our Saviour so that we would become members of His kingdom through faith in Him!

God works to create and sustain life in both the natural world and in the hearts of human beings. In Isaiah, God said, “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish...so is my word that goes forth 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.” God's great desire for human beings and His purpose in Christ Jesus, is that the seed of His kingdom would be planted in our hearts through the word of the gospel; be given birth by the Holy Spirit, be nurtured and given growth through the ministry of word and sacrament; that it would mature and in the fullness of time receive a harvest of eternal life in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The earth is God's seedbed awaiting the rebirth of life. Isaiah sang, “Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise...the earth will give birth to the dead.” The harvest of resurrection begins with the word of the gospel sown in our hearts and given life by the working of the Holy Spirit, who gives us faith in Christ Jesus.

We speak of agricultural products as produce and farmers as producers, but it is God who gives the growth. God is the true producer. In Jesus' parable, the farmer sows the seed and then waits for the forces of nature to do their work. Jesus says “He sleeps and he rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.” It's a joy to see seed we have planted with our own hands, germinate and poke through the soil. Vegetables from plants in your own garden, seem to taste better than produce sold at the grocery store. Watering, fertilizing and watching your own plants grow and ripen, gives us a sense of achievement. The things we do facilitate growth, but have you ever planted something and despite your best efforts, little or nothing was produced? Someone once advised me that perhaps I was planting the seeds upside down! After every thing has been sown, fertilized and watered, you have to wait for the earth to do its work and hope that it all works.

In Jesus' parable, the earth automatically causes the seed to germinate, sprout and grow. Good soil, good seed, good growth! That's the way the natural world works. The Sower must depend upon the quality of the seed, the fertility of the ground and hope it rains. The kingdom of God functions differently. In the kingdom of God, the seed is the gospel, the soil is the human heart, but the power is the Spirit of God. Jesus' parables from the natural world are never a straight comparison. There is always a twist, something different and beyond what you find in the world of nature and the world of human beings. The twist is the soil, which in this and surrounding parables, is the human heart. Good seed, bad soil, but God still gives growth!

If you were to compare the human heart to any type of soil, it would be soil so rocky, hard and contaminated that nothing could ever grow in it. It would have less nutrients than the meagre soil that sustains small trees on mountain peaks. Good soil is essential to growth in the natural world. Ancient armies would sometimes sow the fields of their enemies with salt, to ensure that the soil would be useless for cultivation. The human heart is naturally polluted by sin since the sin of the first people. The greatest miracle of life is that the Holy Spirit creates faith in the human heart, (rocky and barren, polluted with sin) through the seed of the gospel. We can never thank God enough for the gift of faith, seeded by the proclamation of the gospel, given life and growth by the Holy Spirit.

What do you identify with in this parable? Seeds! Soil or Sower! I think Christians tend to identify with the Sower. It seems to speak to our responsibility to fulfill the great commission and to go and make disciples of all nations. God wants us to spread the gospel and call others to faith. But the point of the parable is the power of the Holy Spirit to spread and grow the kingdom of God through the word. It is important to spread the seed, but first we must remember to continually reseed our hearts, by being in the word and making faithful and frequent use of the sacraments. There is power in the earth to cause seed to germinate and grow. There is power in the word to create faith, give it growth, cause it to blossom and raise a harvest of eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus. There is greater power in the gospel than in any other seed, because through the word the Holy Spirit creates and nurtures faith in Jesus, which reaps a harvest of eternal life.

The kingdom of God is His righteous reign on earth which begins in the human heart with faith in Jesus as Saviour. God begins His reign in our hearts through the gospel of faith and forgiveness and gives it growth through continuous reseeded by the continued study of the scriptures and use of the sacraments. The gospel is the good news of God's love in Christ. The gospel is the good news of forgiveness in Christ. The gospel is the good news of new life in Christ, in which we no longer live according to the evil of our spirits, but according to the righteousness of Christ as we are led by the Spirit of God. The power is in the seed. The seed is the gospel of God's love and forgiveness for the sake of Christ Jesus. The power in the seed is the Holy Spirit who is always present with the word to create faith and always at work through the word, to nourish and maintain faith and bring it to fruition in resurrection to life everlasting.

God who has given us the rebirth of faith and brought us into His kingdom of grace bless us with His Spirit until faith is fulfilled in our share of the great harvest, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen