

There are many parables in the gospels, many of which are repeated from one to another. The gospel of Matthew contains many parables that are found only there. Some of those parables include; "The Tares among the Wheat (Matthew 13:24 – 30)," "The Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44 – 46)," "The Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1 – 16)," and the parable of, "The Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32)." Today, we are examining a parable that is only found in the Gospel of Mark. It is the parable of, "The Growing Seed" and is recorded in Mark 4 verses 26 – 29. Please stand as you are comfortable for the reading of God's Word.

Then Jesus said, "God's kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows—he has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without his help: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. When the grain is fully formed, he reaps—harvest time!"

This is the Word of God and It Can Be Trusted!

Thanks Be To God.

Our Gospel reading today is a parable that finds itself sandwiched between the parable of, "The Sower (Mark 4:1 – 20)" and the parable of "The Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30 – 32)." Some experts do not distinguish this parable from that of, "The Sower," thus discounting our earlier claim that this parable is unique to the Gospel of Mark. Regardless of its uniqueness or inclusivity, the parable assists in marking the time in Jesus Ministry when he began to teach publicly in parables.

As we begin to take a look at the parable of the "The Growing Seed," keep in mind that parables, like riddles, may appear at first to be coded in some way. Matthew records an instance in his gospel where the disciples asked Jesus about this, that is, they asked Jesus, "Why do you tell stories?" Jesus replied, "You've been given insight into God's kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn't been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears. That's why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward

receptive insight. In their present state they can stare till doomsday and not see it, listen till they're blue in the face and not get it . . .”

Jesus is not withholding the truth from some; He isn't saying that only the smart people will understand and be saved. Some people understand spiritual truth and some do not; some have eyes to see and ears to hear, some do not. In the above verses, and through the use of parables, Jesus is making comment on the spiritual condition of people. Through their understanding, or lack thereof, of the teachings of Jesus, we can easily see who has eyes to see and ears to hear the things of God.

When Jesus had the rapt attention of His audience and the people were humble and anxious to hear, Jesus spoke plainly. But, when His audience contained people who were prideful and resistant to His instruction, He used parables that pierced the hearts of those who were open but were lost on the proud.

Second Peter 3:9 teaches that God does not want anyone to perish but, rather, that all would come to repentance. His desire is that all people would turn to Him and seek understanding of

the truths of His Word. He promises that if a person seeks after God, He will reveal himself. Before we continue today, let's take a moment to seek God's will for us this morning and to ask that he reveal himself to us.

Dear Heavenly Father:

We come before you today seeking Your Will for our lives. It is not by our own understanding and learning that we find truth in Your Word, but it is by Your intervention and the fulfillment of Your Promise to reveal Yourself to us, if we but only ask. Lord, we are asking today that you open our minds, our hearts, our eyes and our ears that we may understand your teaching, feel your spirit, see your presence before us and hear your voice today in the words of this parable, "The Growing Seed."

In Christ Name we pray. Amen

"God's kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The parable can be interpreted and applied either to the origins and growth of Christianity in the world, or to the establishment, growth and perfection of God's grace in the soul of the believer. Both views are applicable, and both views are useful. The parable is applicable in the sense that all believers have a responsibility to

carry on the work of Jesus Christ, just as the disciples were instructed to do so in the Garden of Gethsemane when Christ told them of his impending death. Equally so, each believer has a responsibility to foster their own relationship with Christ. Therefore, we find the parable useful as a reminder of not *who* we are, but more importantly, *whose* we are.

What exactly does the parable reveal about the Kingdom of God? Jesus found it important to begin the parable by drawing attention to the Kingdom of God through the use of simile. "God's kingdom is like seed thrown on a field. . ." The Kingdom of God is described in terms of bearing fruit, that is, it is a description of how the Kingdom grows. What is this seed that is being tossed around? While the "seed" is not identified in the parable specifically, it was defined a few verses earlier as the Word of God, Jesus states in verse 14 that, "The farmer plants the *Word*." The seed here, then, is the Word of God. It is spread through the teaching of the Word and the reading of the Word. Notice that the seed is, "thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it." How is it that a man who

teaches the Word and reads the Word can expect to harvest a crop, if after he spreads the it, it is forgotten about.

Jesus is not saying that teaching and reading does not need any follow up. That is, Jesus is not suggesting crops do not need to be toiled, nurtured or cared for. He is not saying that young Christians do not need to be nurtured or cared for. Jesus is saying that growth, whether it is of The Christian Church world wide or a local Community of Faith, or an individual's own personal Faith, is produced by the Word. The farmer can sow the seed and see it sprout and grow, but he cannot be there all of the time. There are occurrences and events that occur during growth that are beyond the comprehension of the farmer; that are beyond his sight. "Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how." Many of the laws of vegetation are known to man, and predictable. For example, it is understood that the seed must decompose, or die, and that from it, comes new life and fruit. But the process is invisible, hidden from the eyes of the farmer. It is not known precisely how it all works.

So it is with the process of the redemption offered to us by the cleansing power of Christ's blood. It is the grace of God, mysterious and invisible to the eyes of man that works within the souls of believers. We must die to our old self before new life can sprout forth. Recall from the story of Nicodemus, Jesus said, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." God alone knows the process, and sees its influence on the heart and mind of each recipient.

Speaking of every Christian as a Pastor, the Pastor sows the seed; as members of the Priesthood of all Believers you all sow seeds, but we can only see the outward signs of its influence on the heart of the new Christian or on the hearts of a new Community of Faith such as we are. But God knows. He knows every nuance of every soul and is aware of the inner workings of every forging process of every heart. Like the farmer in the parable, we must sometimes "forget about it" and let God do His part. We should not micromanage the process of salvation, but

trust that God will bring to maturity the process that has started within each of us.

So what of this process? Can we reap harvest just days after the seed has been sown? Absolutely not! The growth produced by the Word is not only a mystery, it is also gradual. Simply stated, growth will not occur all at once. Rather it is a step by step process, “. . . first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain.” The blade is representative of a new nature; heavenly and tender, yet infantile. The blade symbolizes the new Christian or what we used to call them in college; baby Christians. Next, the bud arrives as the Christian matures to a level exhibiting spiritual life. That is, they find themselves deeply rooted and involved, they are preparing their own hearts for God’s will and they are beginning to spread seeds of their own. *Budding* Christians are praying Christians, concerned with spiritual matters and pushing themselves to maturity through bible study and surrounding themselves with like minded individuals.

Lastly the grain ripens. The once baby Christians that has worked diligently to strengthen their spiritual life through prayer and reading/studying the Word begins to show signs of bearing fruit. They demonstrate love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, not by their own strength but by the grace and nurturing of God. 2 Peter 1 reminds us that, "For this reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. If you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 5 – 8).

The parable of, "The Growing Seed" teaches us that there are two ways to utilize this powerful *seed*. First, we must receive it into our hearts and secondly, we must sow it as far and wide as possible. The Vision Statement of the International Christian Community Churches is to "to build and foster Christ-Centered Community where the Kingdom of God will break forth." By

receiving the seed into our hearts we are talking about the growth of the Kingdom of God in our lives.

Of course, we must receive it properly, that is (1) with a good and noble heart (Luke 8:15, Acts 17:11), (2) with meekness (James 1:21) and (3) as babies longing for their mother's milk (1 Peter 2:2); all the while *laying aside* those things that would "choke" out the Word in our lives (James 1:21; 1 Peter 2:1). Remember those roadblocks and misdirected detours we've talked so much about. Those are the things that, if we are not careful, can "choke" out the Word in our lives. When we receive the seed into our hearts, growth will occur. But remember that the parable teaches that the growth will be gradual; ". . . first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain." Thus we find the need to continue to feed upon the Word of God and secure it deep within our hearts, "Then you'll grow up mature and whole in God" (1 Peter 2:2).

By sowing the Word of God as far and wide as we possibly can, we recognize our responsibility to promote the growth of the Kingdom of God in the world. Like the farmer in the parable, we

must "sow the seed everywhere." In addition, we must remember that growth comes only through the divine power of the seed; we are simply the "seed throwers" and the "water boys." Growth, again, comes in stages, not all at once. There will be days when all we seem to be doing is sowing seed; other days it will seem that we are spending the majority of our time waiting. Like the farmer, we must be patient and trust that God is in control. We are reminded of this in the book of James, Chapter 5 where James writes, "Meanwhile, friends, wait patiently for the Master's Arrival. You see farmers do this all the time, waiting for their valuable crops to mature, patiently letting the rain do its slow but sure work. Be patient like that; stay steady and strong" (v. 7).

The general lesson in the parable of "The Growing Seed" is then this; in the Kingdom of God, as in the kingdom of nature, we are laborers together with God. We work that we may spread the seed and absorb His Word for the betterment of those around us and for the enrichment of our own relationship with God. The results of our work depend on God, and for the perfection of

these results we must continue to trust that it will all manifest in God's time.

This being the case, it is our duty to sow the seed, that is, to spread and share the Word of God with all those we encounter; our family, our friends, those within our own faith community and especially those that live apart from any own community of faith. We all know people who are not sharing in God's wonderful grace and love this morning. We have friends and family who have either never truly experienced God's love for them or who have been so hurt by the world that they are no longer able to open up their hearts to God and His Word. Maybe someone here today has been hurt by the World; rejected by their family or been told by those they once trusted that they are unworthy of God's love.

God has not rejected you and he has not chosen to separate himself from you or our family and friends who are unable to trust in Him. Having sown the seed, we must wait for time and God to perfect the growth. The growth that comes will do so in gradual stages; new growth, as well as restorative and healing

growth. Not until there has been time for development are we to expect to reap.

Therefore this parable teaches us to trust and hope in power of the Word of God. Do we trust in its power to save the lost or to save our own soul? We should; for the gospel is God's power to save. "I am not ashamed of the gospel," writes Paul, "because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Romans 1:16). Do not be discouraged. If you have loved ones that are unsaved, then pray for them. Sow the seeds spoken of today, but do not give up on them. Do not think that there is no hope for them. God is their hope and there is no one beyond God's reach or undeserving of His love.

So I ask you today, are you sowing the seed of the Kingdom? Are you sowing them both in the world and in your own life today? Challenge yourself this week to advance in Christian holiness by moving forward toward perfection. Contemplate your heavenly rewards, renew your soul and elevate your desire for God by keeping yourself in His Word. Continue to

trust in God and you will be blessed with Spiritual Vegetation.

Amen.