

Text: Mark 4:26-34
Date: June 18, 2006 (The 2nd Sunday of Pentecost)
Location: Zion Lutheran Church- North Battleford
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Grace and Peace be unto you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

I would like to start off this morning by wishing all fathers and families a happy and joyous Father's Day.

Though I have only had the pleasure of celebrating 3 Father's Days as a dad myself, I am starting to get the hang of the weekend. And I quite enjoy it!

My daughter, Carmella, comes running to me with a present in one hand and a card in the other. Carmella then gives me a hug and then hurriedly says, "Daddy, open!" And when I open my present, I am greeted by the wonderful gift of a coffee mug that proudly proclaims for the entire world to see, "World's Greatest Dad!" or "All-Star Dad!"

And following this exciting moment of proud parenthood, we go out for supper. This year, we went out for Chinese food. We had a good meal...

Now at the end of the meal, when the waitress brought our bill, she also brought 3 fortune cookies. Now hopefully all of here realize the fortune cookies offer no real insight into the future...but they have to be read!

So, after savoring our cookies, we read aloud our fortunes:

Carmella: You will meet an intriguing gentleman. (She's two years old, everyone's intriguing to her!)

Loralee: You will receive a large inheritance. (Well that sounds like great news! But hold on...doesn't this fortune mean that someone she loves is going to die? Maybe this isn't such good news!)

Sheldon: A father is someone who has pictures in his wallet where money used to be. No, that's not what it really said. Rather, it said: A wise man thinks twice and steps once. (Umm...Ok...What the heck does that mean?)

The thing about these little tidbits of innocuous wisdom found inside of a tasty cookie is that they purposely make them so vague that they could apply to anyone.

Here, try and figure this one out: "The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, that when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth..." (Mk 4:31) or how about this one: "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how." (Mk 4:26)

Well that is great Christ, but what does it mean?

As we see throughout Scripture, our Lord Jesus often taught the crowds that came to hear him preach God's Word by speaking to them in parables. In fact, today's Gospel lesson concludes by saying that it was the exclusive means he used to teach most people. (Mk 4:33-34)

Only Christ's disciples got the inside scoop when he would pull them aside for a private session after the crowds had dispersed and the day's work was done. Then, when they were alone, he would reveal to them the spiritual meaning behind the illustrations he used to present God's truth. (Mk 4:34)

That was great for the disciples ... but I wonder how frustrating that must have been for the others. Can you imagine being all excited because the great miracle-working Rabbi you've been hearing so much about had finally come to your town? And then going to see Jesus – only to hear him teach the two very simple "garden" stories we heard this morning: the parables of the Growing Seed and the Mustard Seed. You'd probably walk away wondering, "What was that all about?"

Imagine then arriving at home and trying to explain it to a family member or friend who wasn't there: "So, did you get to hear Jesus?" "Yeah, I did." "Well, were you impressed? What did he say?" "Um ... he said the kingdom of God is like a guy who plants seeds. After he plants them, he kind of sits back while they grow all by themselves; and after they mature, he harvests them." "Oh. Well ... that's true, I guess, I mean about the seeds and plants and all ... but did you

really need a famous Rabbi to tell you that? And what does it have to do with the kingdom of God? Did he say anything else?" "Yeah, well, he said the kingdom of God is like a little, itty-bitty seed that grows into a really big plant. Oh yeah, and something about birds living in it." "That's it?" "Yeah ... pretty much all he said; but he said it really well." "You're kidding me. What is this guy, a religious teacher or somebody who works for the Department of Agriculture? How come everybody says he's such a great Bible teacher? It doesn't even sound like he talks about the Scriptures."

It would appear that much of what Jesus said was pretty confusing to most people. Heck, it even appears that Christ's closet followers, his own chosen disciples, didn't always understand what Christ was saying. Thankfully we are not left to our own device to try and comprehend what Christ meant by these words. Thankfully God has blessed us with the gift of the Holy Spirit and the thoughtful testimony of great thinkers such as St. Paul.

So let us try and prayerfully discover what Christ is trying to tell us about God's kingdom.

Firstly, in the parable of the Growing Seed (Mk 4:26-29) we see that Christ is emphasizing the seed itself. The seed to which Christ speaks is the living thing- it is the seed that grows.

Once the sower throws the seed out upon the ground, it is out of his hands- he is no longer in control. There's nothing he can do to make the seed germinate, or bring the plant to life, or make it grow faster. The seed does all the work while the sower goes about his business, and takes his breaks, and goes to sleep and so on. Likewise, the soil is passive. All it does is receive the seed and hold it while it does its thing. We might say later that the field is fruitful and productive, but that's not exactly true. The fact is that it's the seed in the field that grew and produced the crop.

That's a great lesson in agronomy, but what does it mean to us? Well, I think that Christ is telling us that the seed is the Word of God, and we are the sower who casts it out into the world by sharing the good news of the gospel or performing acts of love and charity in Christ's name. The soil, well it is the world. It is those who hear the gospel proclaimed, it is those whom are changed by our love, it is everyone whom Christ dies to redeem and save.

As an example of how this works, consider that I can stand and here and attempt to preach God's word hour upon hour (as I am sure some of you think that I do); but in the end- no matter how eloquent my words or lengthy my delivery) I cannot stir up the faith of one person. But the word of God (which hopefully I faithfully proclaim) can. God's Word is the seed. Only it has the power to grow and transform lives. If I don't have it, then I (in the words of St. Paul) am nothing more than a ringing gong.

The second parable of Christ which we heard proclaimed today- that is the parable of The Mustard Seed- shows us the amazing power for growth of God's Word.

Take careful notice of what Christ compares the Kingdom of God to- The puny and seemingly insignificant Mustard seed.

But what seems puny and insignificant like a tiny seed grows to become a huge plant – far out of proportion to its initial size. As hopefully that rotten banana during the children's story reminded us, we should never "judge a book by its cover." While God's Word may seem insignificant to some, it is in fact the strongest thing in all of creation. As the psalmist tells us, God speaks and the earth trembles.

Interestingly, in all of this talk about seeds, we would do well to remember that our Lord Jesus Christ referred to himself as a seed that had to be planted. He was talking about his death and subsequent burial. When he died as the sacrifice for the sins of the world, his body went into the ground like a seed. At the time it didn't look like very much: a flash in the pan preacher who died like so many other Messianic wannabes. His life was short, he lived in a tiny, backward, and out of the way country, he never wrote a thing, and he was tried as a criminal and crucified in shame. His closest disciples were shattered and disillusioned. They gave up on him.

When they sealed the tomb, no one ever expected to hear anything more about him. But three days later the Seed sprouted. His body came back to life and appeared in resplendent glory. And his church, which he now calls his body, experienced amazing growth. Fifty days after his resurrection, there were more than 3000 believers. Within thirty years, there were churches in big and small cities all over the Roman world – even though it was an outlawed religion. Three hundred years later, it was the only legal religion in the Roman world. And today some two billion people confess Christ as Lord and Savior. And his church continues to grow today, with the Word of his Gospel going out into the world in traditional ways, and now with newer means such as radio and the internet – extending the range the Seed can be cast, and reaching new, distant fields. All this, from one, little, seemingly insignificant Seed.

Thanks be to God, for giving us that seed that brings new life!

Amen