



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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July 2, 2006  
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
Mark 4:26-34  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Ezekiel 17:22-24  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 92  
Second Lesson: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10  
Gospel: Mark 4:26-34

### **The Word of God Grows**

Gradually, Inconspicuously, Impressively

Do you remember how old you were when you stopped growing? Did your growth spurt come later or earlier? How old were you when you never ever again had to worry about getting a hair cut, never ever again had to trim your fingernails or toenails, never ever again had a new thought come into your brain that was new—you heard it all, you knew it all, nothing ever changed because you had stopped growing? Hopefully you figured it out. You don't ever stop growing. You might not get taller, but you never stop growing.

Part of what God certainly wants us to do as Christians isn't one of his commands for us. It is to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That truth that you can see even in your own body, growth is a natural part of life, is what Jesus tells in these two parables in our reading from Mark this morning. He wants us to recognize certain truths about growth—growth of his kingdom. In his kingdom there is his rule of grace among us through the Word and the Sacrament, through the means of grace—how he rules in our hearts and our lives as he leads us by his grace that comes to us in Word and Sacrament.

This morning he tells us how the Gospel grows, the kingdom of God grows. He reminds us that it grows gradually so that we recognize that truth because otherwise Satan is going to try to use it to thwart God's plans. It grows, at times, inconspicuously. It doesn't look like much as you see it and look at it from the outside. But the one truth that we need to realize also this morning is that it grows impressively. God produces results in his way and in his time that are beyond our imagining, and it is what leads us to be here this morning to pray to our God and to sing his praises.

Parables—that is what Jesus tells here—an earthly truth that people can easily understand to teach a heavenly meaning, a heavenly lesson. So he starts out by teaching the Word of God grows gradually. It is pretty easy to see with the parable he uses in a sense, isn't it? You don't plan the seed on Tuesday and on Wednesday harvest, do you? It might be nice, but that is not how it works. Day after day, whether he sleeps or gets up, he said that it grows, and it grows gradually. It isn't there immediately overnight, but gradually, through the power that God has put into that, the seed grows just like in God's kingdom, through the power of the Gospel, as we heard in our First Lesson and in our Second Lesson. It is God who does the work, but we are reminded that at times he does it gradually. Day after day, slowly but surely, the Gospel does its work.

Why is that important for you and me to know? Have you ever in your life screwed up the courage, ignored the knot in the pit of your stomach and then talked about your Savior to someone who doesn't know him?—someone who, if the world ended right now, they would be in hell? Did you talk to them even though it hurt almost? And then you invited them to come to church or a Bible class or come and learn more or come back and talk with you so they could learn more and they laughed in your face? Have you ever had that happen? Or they kind of gave you that verbal pat on the head, “that’s nice, but don’t waste my time” and still tried to be polite even though they didn’t say that?

When those kinds of things happen to us, and at times they will happen to us, the devil wants us to say to ourselves, “That’s it, never again. I tried sowing the seed of the Gospel. It didn’t work. I am not putting myself on the line anymore. Leave that to the trained experts. That’s not for me.” That’s what the devil wants you to think. Or the devil even might get you to thinking, “God says the Word is like the rain that goes forth and it produces a result. I don’t see a result. God’s a liar.” You might not put it that crassly but that might be what you end up thinking and doing in your actions and thus sin against the Lord.

God’s Word works, but it works on his timeframe, not on ours. Sometimes it takes a constant sowing of the Gospel in people, sharing it with them lovingly and patiently again and again and letting them see the results of it in our lives and telling them about the comfort it brings us. Paul himself even said it. *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow* (1 Corinthians 3:6). He talks about it in one of his letters. He planted it but others had to come along and tend it and take care of it and then eventually it took root and it prospered and it grew. God’s Word is not going to work on our timetable. There may be people that you and I dearly love and we are worried, when we lay our head on the pillow at night when we go to sleep, that they are not going to be in heaven with us because they have given really no indication that they believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ even if they have heard it before and know it. We may wonder, “God, why aren’t you working faster? I want them in heaven with me. God, why isn’t this taken care of?” But you and I can’t produce the results. All you and I can do is be faithful in how we sow the seed and then trust that God will produce his results in his time and in his way.

Luther once said that more work got done in God’s kingdom while he sat in his house drinking Wittenberg beer than had been done in many a year because the Gospel had been sown and people carried that Gospel into their daily lives and he trusted God that it would produce results just as Jesus said, first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel. Our job is to sow the Gospel, proclaim it and then trust God will produce the results.

It does work gradually, but it also at times had an inauspicious beginning, an inconspicuous beginning. Jesus kind of teaches us that, I suppose you would say, when he tells us the Parable of the Mustard Seed. The mustard seed doesn’t look like much. It was the smallest of all the seeds they would plant. It was rather insignificant. At least that is how it appeared when it was planted in the garden. That inconspicuous beginning, I suppose, is a lot like what you and I see as we proclaim the Gospel. Think

of the Gospel itself. Talk about inconspicuous beginnings. Here is a man who never owned a home, never had the trappings of glory or honor while he lived in this world, went from place to place, had a group of women who followed him around and took care of his needs of clothing or shoes or food or whatever it might be. He lived on the good will of others in many ways. He taught and he performed magic tricks I suppose is how some people viewed it. Then he ended up dying a death as a criminal, hung between two other criminals on a cross that was there just to scare people right outside the city so they could all see the gruesome nature of his death and they would know, "Don't mess with us Romans." It doesn't sound like the beginning of the message that would change the world, does it?

Isn't that what God said? His Gospel is foolishness to those who are perishing. It can only be understood spiritually. It is spiritual truths that are spiritually discerned. (See 1 Corinthians 2:13-14.) You and I look at those same things and we thrill to the tip of our toes that God loved us that much that he was willing to stretch out his arms on the cross and he loved us that much that he left heaven and spent those 33 years in this world being perfect in our place. We thrill to hear it, but we wouldn't have known that if someone wouldn't have shared the Gospel with us and the Spirit wouldn't have worked in our hearts so that we understand that, even out of this inconspicuous beginning, God has achieved incredible things.

Think about what you have seen, even within these walls where you gather together to worship. You see a child come up to a piece of marble; it is so clear, right? The pastor says a few words and pours some water on that child's head three times—sometimes the child is quiet and sometimes the child is kicking and screaming before and after—and you say to yourself, "I don't see any difference." It doesn't look like they went from a child of Satan to a child of God. It looks like their forehead got wet, but because of that promise that is attached to it; you and I know that God washed away that child's sins. God worked faith in that child's heart. It's inconspicuous. It doesn't look like much, but it has an incredible effect that we return to each and every day of our lives as we repent and go back to the waters of our baptism and say, "Lord, forgive me because I have been clothed with Christ's righteousness." Or you come and kneel at the altar or stand at the altar with five other Christians, six of you at a time, receive a little flat piece of bread and a sip of wine—as a kid did you ever notice the people coming back, were they any different? Did you notice any big change in them? When I was growing up, mom and dad would come to communion, but if I screwed up later in the day, dad was just as ornery as before he went to communion when I messed up, and let me have it just as clearly. What is the big change? You don't always see it, do you?

The promise that is attached to that simple bread and that simple wine is that "this is my body; this is my blood; this is taking away your sins" (see Matthew 26:26-28). And God's promise to us is that as we receive the Sacrament, properly preparing ourselves, he will increase and strengthen our faith and over time you will see it happen. I see it all the time.

You don't see it in an instant, but over time you see it. Just like the kids I see come through my confirmation instruction. They come in and starting out, some of them I think sometimes if I asked them to spell their name when they are looking at me, I don't

think they could do it because they are so scared because now they are looking at the pastor or something like that. But over time, you see these young children and they can handle the Word of God and they can apply it to daily life in incredible ways and you can see it that when they stand in front of this altar, the change. I often think of that, that change that has taken place over the years that I have seen them digging deep into God's Word and growing in it and applying it to their lives. I see it in Bible classes with adults that come. Over time you see them continually coming and you see them go beyond just the "why does he have to keep asking us why" to struggling with those questions and applying it to life and finding great joy in seeing the answers that God has for daily living in his Word. It doesn't take place in an instant. Often it is very inconspicuous, but God's Gospel message in Word and Sacrament does incredible things. It strengthens us so that we can go out and face life. We can apply that Word to our lives and then share it in the lives of others and it does work and I get to see it.

Maybe you can look in your own life and you too can see how God has strengthened you and changed you and you might not have even noticed it because it had such an inconspicuous start. But in the end, you and I end up like that mustard seed that grew into that mustard plant.

In Israel I have read, I've never seen them, but I have read that these mustard plants would grow to 10-15 feet high at times. Certainly big enough that a bird could come and nest in it. It becomes a very impressive plant that would tower over the rest of their gardens plants. As you and I use Word and Sacrament, God works among us so that we do incredible things.

Look at the impressive things God has done among us. We just celebrated 140 years of our school sharing the Gospel with our children. You look at the building we are sitting in, built in 1927 isn't it? In 1927 God moved some people's hearts to build this building in all of its beauty and its glory. Why? Because they wanted the Gospel proclaimed because God's Word had touched their hearts and they wanted it to continue generation after generation after generation. You look around at what God does among us individually and through us and you are seeing a lot of bloomed mustard seeds, aren't you? You are sitting next to some of them. They are in front of you. They are behind you. They are next to you. God works great things in us even though at times we fail in the opportunities he puts in front of us. We keep silent when we could have spoken. We say the wrong things. We hurt someone else's feelings without intending to. Even though we still are sinners who are going to do those things, we are still part of God's kingdom and thus we are some of these mustard plants. Forgiven in Christ for when we have failed, but strengthened by Christ so that we see those opportunities when they come again and that we seize those opportunities when they come again because God's love has touched our hearts and now we want to serve him. We don't have to, but we want to because God's Gospel has grown in us and it grows through us.