

Pentecost 4 6/17/18
Mark 4:26-34 6B

WITH MANY SUCH PARABLES HE SPOKE THE WORD TO THEM, AS THEY WERE ABLE TO HEAR IT.

“With many such parables He spoke the Word to them, as they were able to hear it” (v. 33). We know, from our Sunday School days, that a parable is a story told to teach a point.

So, Jesus teaches us in parable this Sunday, “Yet when [a grain of mustard seed] is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade” (v. 32). No, He is not giving us a lesson in horticulture. Jesus is teaching us about the kingdom of God. The POINT of the parable is this: Just as birds fly to trees for shelter and refuge, the kingdom of God provides us with shelter and refuge.

You know my favorite question for you Lutherans is: “Why”? Why did Jesus teach this parable? When you look at the parallel accounts in Matthew and Luke, we find the ministry of Jesus was under great scrutiny and persecution. Recall last Sunday’s Gospel. The religious leaders in Jerusalem were sending delegations out to investigate Him and discredit Him. They were saying Jesus was possessed by the devil and could only do miracles because Satan was giving Him the power to do them. His own mother, Mary – Mary, who had heard the words of Gabriel and received the wise man and their gifts and drank the wine her Son had created from the water -- and His brothers – His own family – came to take Him home and silence him because they thought He was out of His mind, mentally ill, and bringing shame on the family with His words and behavior.

Jesus speaks the words of our parable to comfort and encourage His

disciples.

We need comfort, we need shelter and refuge from the stormy bliss of life, don't we? Paul writes in our Epistle, "For while we are still in this tent [that is, the tent of our earthly bodies], we groan, being burdened" (2 Co 5:4). Your earthly body is preaching to you all the time – sermons of law! The sore throat and stuffy nose. The ache of arthritis. Cataracts. The heartbeat that flutters or flounders now and then. All of these maladies and pains preach to you that you are fragile and vulnerable. All of these remind you that the tent of your body doesn't last forever.

As if living in the tent of a human body isn't challenging enough, we live each day in the darkness of this valley of the shadow of death. Vandalism, theft, tornadoes, floods, hatred, anger, injustice, loneliness. That darkness surrounds and enfolds us and preaches to us that we are weak and heavy laden.

So, Jesus directs us to a mustard seed. There's small. And then, there's mustard seed small. The point is that something you can hardly see grows and becomes something huge, and marvelous, and wonderful, that serves God's creatures. Look at those words of Paul in our Epistle, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:8). Faith cannot hold or touch or even see the kingdom of God, but Dear Saints of God, from a small mustard seed, God has given you the shelter and safety and rest of the kingdom of God. God Himself says it this way in our OT lesson,

"I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest...I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it (Ez 17)."

These words of God are a Messianic promise. God is promising us that the Messiah will come as a sprig, a branch, of the humble house of David. He will come to be our King, to rule and protect His Church and govern over all the world, especially for the benefit of His Church.

The Good News of the Gospel is that God kept His Word. That sprig, that branch, came as the Seed of a woman to crush the devil's head, as we heard last week. He did not come to the biggest, brightest city, nor a political capital, He came in small, out-of-way Bethlehem, as the prophet said He would, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel" (Micah 5:2). He is not born of a princess or queen, but of a young woman of most humble circumstances. When He comes into this world, where do they find Him? In Nazareth, born in a stable, lying in a manger, for there was not even room for them in the inn. His birth was announced, not to kings, but to shepherds out watching their flocks by night. And His resurrection was announced, not to generals and the powerful, but to a few women who had gone to the tomb to anoint His body.

Today is Father's Day. Father's Day reminds us that God is our dear father and we are His dear children.

God's love reaches out to us and embraces us, granting us salvation and eternal life and He does it through the littlest, most unassuming seeds, so that we trust, rejoice, and hope in Jesus. At the baptismal font, He unites His Word to the Water to wash all our sin away, make us His child, and give us eternal life. At His table, He unites that Word to bread and wine, so that in eating and drinking those smallest of elements, we are given forgiveness, life, and salvation. He speaks His words of peace and life into our ears. Oh no, these are not the ways that we want, that we

expect, or that we demand from God. But, these are the mustard seeds that God plants in us, to draw us closer to Himself and shelter us in the stormy bliss of earthly life.

For now, you groan. You groan as the wages of sin attack the body and bring pains and trouble. You groan in the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death. But, Dear Child of God, you also groan in eager anticipation for the resurrection of the dead, when the earthly tent is no more and you are live at home with God.

As you wait, you do so with certain hope and good courage. Jesus says,

“The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come” (vv. 26-29).

It all starts with fragile, delicate small little seeds, mustard seed small. The farmer in Jesus' parables could be confident about his crop. Even though he did not exactly how his seed would grow, but he had the confidence of knowing it would grow.

We have that same confidence in the kingdom of God. Why do birds fly to trees? Birds fly to trees because trees provide shelter, protection to birds. Trees provide a safe haven for birds.

Children of God, we may be perplexed, confused, frustrated, not sure exactly which way to turn, wondering why this is happening to me. Our emotions and feelings will tell us that God has abandoned us, that we left to fend for ourselves. But, we remember the words of Paul on the Christian life, “We walk by faith, not by sight.” Like the farmer who scatters his seed,

and sleeps, confident that his seed is growing, we are confident because Christ is with us, doing His work in us, and He will bring us safely to His kingdom of heaven, and we will rest from all of our earthly struggles and sorrows, doubts and despairs.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY. AMEN.