

PLANT THE SEED OF GOD'S WORD

June 17, 2024

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First Lesson; Ezekiel 17:22-24

Psalm of the Day; Psalm 92

Second Lesson; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Sermon Text; Mark 4:26-34

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen

God's Word for our consideration today is our Gospel Lesson for today from the Gospel of Mark, chapter four, verses twenty six through thirty four. We read in our Savior's name.

He said, "The Kingdom of God is like this: A man scatters seed on the ground, and while he sleeps and rises, night and day, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. The ground produces fruit on its own: first the blade, then the head, then the full grain in the head. When the crop is ready, he swings the sickle without delay, because the harvest has come."

Then He said, "To what should we compare the Kingdom of God? Or with what parable may we picture it? It is like a mustard seed, which when sown on the ground is one of the smallest of all the seeds planted in the ground. Yet when it is planted, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches so that the birds of the sky can nest under its shade."

With many similar parables He continued to speak The Word to

them, as much as they were able to hear. He did not speak to them without a parable. But when He was alone with His disciples, He explained everything to them.

So far the Word of our God.

These are your words, Heavenly Father. Make us holy by your truth. Your Word is truth.

Amen

In a way you could call it, “*A Tale of Two Fathers*”. In the year 1900 the University of Wisconsin published a book by a man named A.E Winship, entitled, ***Jukes-Edwards: A Study in Education and Heredity***. And Winship, in this book, went and looked at the descendants, the collective descendants of generations, following two men who lived at roughly the same time period, and who lived in roughly the same part of the country. And yet, these two men couldn't have been more different from each other.

The first one was given a pseudonym, a fake name, by the name of 'Max Juke'. Max Juke was born sometime between 1720 and 1740, but nobody knows exactly when he was born. Juke was known by everybody around him as kind of a 'wild man'. He was a guy who lived on his own in the woods, and an uneducated, drunkard.

Of Max Juke's roughly 1200 descendants that were able to be tracked down, 140 were convicted criminals, 280 had lived in poverty and destitution at some point, or another in their lives, over half the women were considered by the community to be harlots, and 50 of those women were paid prostitutes. Among the number of his descendants, 18 ran brothels, 7 were convicted murderers, and 67 of them died of syphilis. Such was the parental legacy of Max Juke.

On the other hand, you have a man by the name of Jonathan Edwards. Jonathan Edwards was a prominent, Reformed pastor and preacher, who lived at roughly the same time. He was also the

president of the seminary at Princeton University in the 1700's. Of the 729 descendants of Jonathan Edwards, you could find hardly any criminals. Instead you find 100 lawyers, 30 judges, 13 college presidents, over 100 college professors, 60 doctors, over 100 pastors and missionaries, 75 military officers, three U. S. Congressmen, and one U.S. Vice President.

What a stark difference between these two men, between Edwards and Juke. It is mind-blowing, isn't it? It goes to show that parents – especially as fathers – we have tremendous influence, not only on own kids, but on generations to come!

So, for those of you who are parents, and those of you who are dads, have I caused maybe a slight, little, increase in your parental anxiety? You realize it is not just about your own kids, even though our own kids are reason enough to make us anxious, sometimes. Think back to when you were a kid, and the sleepless nights you caused your parents, because they were worried about how you were going to turn out. Even now, those of you who are parents, sometimes we wonder about the job we are doing as moms and dads? We wonder whether our kids will grow up, and turn out okay? Or, the more important question, the most important question of all, “*Will I see my kids in Heaven, someday?*”

We get so wrapped up in that anxiety sometimes, maybe not right when we are in the thick of parenting, but in those quiet moments, when we get to pause, and reflect on things. We get so wrapped up in that anxiety, and we get so worried about the future of our kids, that it is easy for us to overlook one of the most simple, and most comforting promises of God. It is the promise that Jesus highlights in these two parables, when it comes to the power of God's Word in our lives, the promise that Jesus makes, that really is true for parents, as well as the rest of the church! When God's people plant the seed of God's Word, it is planted in human hearts, and it grows. The seed of God's Word grows, when the seed of God's Word is planted in

human hearts. God's ruling influence in our lives grows, when the seed of His Word is planted. That seed grows both reliably, and magnificently.

In Jesus' first parable, the whole point He is trying to make there is the fact that His seed, the seed of His Word, grows reliably when it is planted. He says,

**“The Kingdom of God is like this:
A man scatters seed on the ground,
and while he sleeps and rises, night and day,
the seed sprouts and grows,
though he does not know how.”**

The Word of God grows in a person's heart, even though you and I have no idea how it happens, sometimes! And yet, God promises that the seed of His Word will grow, anyway.

In my first parish there was a young man who came to church with his parents when he was a boy. But, once he got to be in high school, after confirmation, he stopped coming to church. It caused much consternation for his parents, because they were very faithful people. They were frustrated by the fact that they could not get their own son to come to church. They would ask him, *“Why are you not coming to church? Why don't you want to go?”*

He would answer, *“Well, I know all that stuff, already.”*

So, it was a bit of a surprised to me, (*a few years after I had taken a call to another parish*), the parents told me that their son had gotten married in church! Not only had he gotten married in church, but his wife was taking adult instruction class in church. Lo and behold, both of them were coming to worship regularly!

How did it happen? They don't know. I don't know. Only God knows! But what we do know is the seed had been planted in that young man's heart, from the time he was a little baby. That seed was planted in the waters of Holy Baptism. That seed was planted, as he came to church, and Sunday School, and he heard The Word of

God, again, and again. That seed was planted every time his parents talked about Jesus. And over time, that seed grew!

Now, that situation doesn't always happen, does it? Sadly, a person can still reject The Word of God. But that's not the fault of God's Word. Jesus talks about how The Word grows really all by itself. He says,

“The ground produces fruit on its own:

first the blade, then the head, then the full grain in the head.”

It grows all by itself, automatically, on its own.

-The power isn't in those who plant the seed, the sower.

-The power is not in the one who is scattering the seed.

-Nor is the power in the dead, lifeless dirt of the sinful, human heart.

The power is in The Word, the seed.

It grows all on its own, Jesus said. Yes, there is a progression to that growth, and that progression takes time. It starts with the blade. If you are driving around, you see the blades of corn sticking out of the ground in the fields right now. You know someday soon, those blades are going to start to get bigger, and bigger. There will be tassels on that corn. By the end of the summer you know there will be full ears of corn on those stalks. But, it takes time.

In Isaiah 55 God says that the word from His mouth

“will not return to Him empty,

but will accomplish what He desires

and achieve the purpose for which He sent it.”

So, as moms and dads, the most important thing we can do is plant that seed of God's Word.

-Bring them to the waters of Baptism – the washing of water and The Word.

-Teach them about their Savior.

-Teach them God's commands that set limits on our lives, according to the Will of God.

-And also teach them God's promises in Jesus - the promise their

sins are forgiven.

-Teach them that they have the hope of Heaven, and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

The thing is, we can teach them. We can plant those seeds even though it often looks like those seeds are not going to do anything. You can start planting that seed right when they are little.

-We can Teach them The Lord's Prayer, and have them pray it, when they go to bed at night.

-We can teach our kids The Apostles Creed so they can say it with us, when they are in church on Sunday morning.

-We can teach our kids The Ten Commandments.

We plant the seed, and trust that it will grow. We trust that it will grow even when it looks like nothing's happening. And trust me, there are plenty of times when you look at your kids, and it will look like nothing's happening! But then, when we see that, we need to resist the temptation to go in, the day after we plant the seeds, try to 'dig up the garden', and find out what is going on! We know how it worked with ourselves. You and I – we didn't start bearing fruits of faith overnight. It took time. And yet, we can still plant that seed of God's Word, because we know Jesus has promised there will be a harvest one day!

Jesus says,

**“When the crop is ready,
he swings the sickle without delay,
because the harvest has come”**

You think about what He means by that. What Jesus was talking about there, He was saying, when the time is right, when that seed of His Word has been planted in somebody's heart, and grows to its maturity, it's fruit bearing maturity, at just the right time, Lord Jesus will gather us into the perfect Kingdom of Heaven. That's the promise He gives to us. That is the promise you and I have in Christ, the promise that goes all the way back to our Baptism, the

promise Peter says is for you and for your children, and all who are far off!

And yet, we still wonder about the seeds sometimes, don't we? We still wonder about the seeds, because the seed doesn't look like much. And yet, Jesus assures us that this seed He plants in our hearts will not only grow reliably, but it will it grow God's Kingdom magnificently, too! That's the point of Jesus' second parable, *The Parable of the Mustard Seed*.

“To what should we compare the Kingdom of God?

Or with what parable may we picture it?

It is like a mustard seed, which when sown on the ground is one of the smallest of all the seeds planted in the ground.

**Yet when it is planted,
it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants
and puts out large branches so that the birds of the sky
can nest under its shade.”**

You know, you probably could not see the mustard seeds I was showing the kids earlier, because they are so tiny. You have to be so careful with them. I had to be so careful with them, because I was sure the wrong breeze was going to blow them away! And yet, there's a magnificent secret inside each of those little mustard seeds. It is a magnificent secret that is only discovered after that seed is planted in the ground. The fact that seed can grow to be one of the biggest, and tallest plants in the whole garden, eight, even ten feet tall! The branches it produces are big enough, and thick enough, that the birds can build nests in your mustard plant.

And it's the same with the Kingdom of God. You think about how God's Kingdom starts here on earth. The Kingdom of God starts small, with an insignificant beginning that's easily overlooked. It starts with the Seed, Himself, the living Word of God, Jesus Christ. He appears so small, and insignificant. A baby in a manger, with only a lowly carpenter, and a young peasant girl to be His parents

and raise Him. Later on, you see Jesus nailed to a cross, counted as a criminal, mocked, and made fun of by priests, passerby, and soldiers, abandoned by His friends, and even by His own Heavenly Father, God the Father, as He suffered, and died in the darkness, for the sins of the world. You even think about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that moment of Jesus' glory is still marked with humility, isn't it? Even the witnesses of the risen Jesus are not the kind of people society would look at as necessarily reliable. And yet, that is the mustard seed, isn't it, that is given to us? That is the mustard seed that is planted in our hearts. That mustard seed, Jesus, brings to us the mustard seeds of His Word and Sacraments.

You think how lowly your Bible looks. It is just words printed on paper, paper that can be easily burned up, or thrown away. Words that can easily be spoken against, or ignored.

You think about Baptism. It is just a few splashes of water connected with some of those words.

Or, The Lord's Supper. A bite of bread, and a sip of wine. How small and insignificant all those things look in the eyes of the world. And yet, you look at the Kingdom that grows, as a result of those lowly mustard seeds. You look at the blessings God brings through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus establishes His Kingdom among us through His birth, death, and resurrection. He has removed the guilt of all of our sins. He has opened up the magnificent Kingdom of Heaven to all who believe. Jesus has planted His Kingdom in this world! He has removed the guilt of all of our sins, and opened to us the magnificent Kingdom of Heaven! And through His simple words and sacraments, Jesus brings His Kingdom to us, personally.

We become part of that Kingdom,

-that Kingdom of forgiveness and everlasting life,

-that Kingdom that is growing and expanding day, by day in each, and every one of our hearts,

-that Kingdom that is growing and expanding each, and every day, one soul at a time, as people receive the good news of their Savior. That little, tiny, lowly, mustard seed is still growing. That Kingdom is still growing among us today.

Today is a very special day for a couple of different reasons. Obviously, first of all, it is Father's Day. So, "*Happy Father's Day*" for all of you dads, and for those of you who are not dads, "*Happy Father's Day*" to your dad.

But, it's also a special day for us as a church body. Today is a special day for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod. It's our synod's birthday! On June 16, 1918, there was a small gathering of sixteen pastors, and about 150 laymen. They gathered in this little church in northern Iowa called Lime Creek Lutheran Church. They could not conduct their meeting in Norwegian, because the state of Iowa, during WWI, had passed an English Only Law. They did not want meetings to be conducted in foreign languages, during the war. So, they actually had to walk one mile north across the Minnesota border, and have their meeting there! They met that day, and unanimously passed a resolution founding our synod as a Biblical Confessional Lutheran church body. You think about what happened in those tiny beginnings.

In his book, *A City Set on a Hill*, S. C. Ylvisaker remarked about that day, and that gathering of those few pastors, representing those congregations. "*It was nothing spectacular.*"

And yet, you think about what has happened since that day. You and I are part of a church body that roughly consists of 171 pastors, and 129 congregations, supporting a college, and a seminary for the training of future pastors and teachers, giving Christian education to our young people, carrying out mission work at home and abroad, all so that more, and more souls every year are brought into the everlasting arms of our Lord Jesus!

Think about all those magnificent blessings, and how God can take

something so small as that little, tiny, mustard seed, and cause it to grow! You think about those blessings, and they exist only because that tiny seed of the Gospel is being planted in the soil of human hearts! So, plant the seed of God's Word. Plant it in the hearts of our kids, but also our friends, and neighbors. We plant that seed that is able to create new life all on its own, the seed through which we receive magnificent blessings, blessings that we cannot even fathom, including the fruits of patience, confidence in Christ, and in the power of His Word. That seed is growing in us, a life that will last forever, at the harvest of our Savior!

Amen

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts, and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen