



Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon- 4th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 6B) 2018

The hidden success of Jesus' ministry!



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

• **The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mark 4, 26-34:**

- Commentary CPH 4 26 And he *proceeded to say*, “The reign and rule of God is **like this**, as (when) a man throws the seed upon the ground
- 27 And he sleeps and he rises (*regularly*) night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows long—how, he himself does not know.
- 28 **In an automatic way** the ground bears fruit, first a blade, then an ear, then full grain in the ear.
- 29 And when the fruit allows (the opportunity), immediately he sends out the sickle, because the harvest is at hand.”
- 30 And he *continued to say*, “How shall we liken the reign and rule of God, or with what parable shall we present it?
- 31 Thus, to a seed of mustard, which, when it is sown onto the earth—it being smaller than all the seeds that are on the ground—
- 32 and when it is sown, it comes up and becomes greater than all the garden plants and produces great branches, with the result that the winged fowl of the sky **are able to encamp under its shade.**”
- 33 And **with many parables of this** sort he *tried to speak publicly* the message to them, just as they were able **actually to hear.**
- 34 And apart from a parable he *would not* speak to them, but privately, to his own disciples, he *would explain* all things.
- **Let us pray:** *Come Holy Spirit, sow Your seed in us and amongst us, so that we will be amongst the fruit of Jesus' Kingdom! Amen.*

• **Dear beloved of the Father!**

- Rabbi's of today say that Jesus' ministry was not successful, and therefore they claim, that Jesus could not be the Messiah. He gathered only eleven men around Himself, they say.
- The Word of God paints an even darker picture, if you really want to be critical of Jesus' ministry, looking at it from the outside. When Jesus died on the Cross, only He trusted in His resurrection, which He had proclaimed beforehand to His disciples at least three times. So, we can say, yes, you Rabbi's, Jesus' ministry began with one seed, only one seed, that was sown into the ground. That is how miniscule the beginning was. One seed in the ground, not eleven, only one!

- This is what Jesus Himself proclaimed, that is how it always was going to be! His Kingdom and the growth of His Kingdom is a true mystery to those of humankind who are viewing it from the outside. The smallest seed of all, the weakest beginning, the most humble origin of all kingdoms- that is what the kingdom of God is like. But, this little humble seed, came up and grew into a huge tree, so huge that indeed, in our days, we may witness it, all nations find a place in its shade against the scorching heat of God's wrath!
- People of all nations find rest in Christ! So, it is definitely not true that Jesus' mission was not successful: Though very small in the beginning, it has grown into the largest tree, branching out into all nations of the world, something which no other religion even gets close to. Remember, Jesus spoke this parable, before His crucifixion and resurrection. Yet, He was absolutely spot on. That is exactly how it turned out to be! This is truly amazing! This is awesome!
- The power of this Kingdom does not lie in outward forces, to be observed. That is what the other parable for today tells us. The seed is scattered on the ground by a man. The man does nothing to make the seed grow. He sleeps and rises. In an automatic way the ground bears fruit, not at once but growing the blade, then an ear, then full grain in the ear. The point is, once it starts growing it follows a pattern and nothing and no one can stop it. So, there is a hidden growing force within the fertile ground which drives the growth until the harvest is at hand.
- If you look at it from the outside, people who have received the Word of God from a servant of the Word, grow into believers and produce fruit without the coercion, without the sower forcing or making it grow! No challenge techniques or any functions of the Law get it to grow. It grows automatic. The Gospel-seed is planted in the ground. This is the miracle of the kingdom of God. The sower does not contribute in the growth of the fruit, as long as he sows the right good seed! This parable presupposes, that the seed fell into the fertile earth, not on the path, not on the rocky ground and not amongst the thorns.
- Jesus told these parables to the crowds who were gathering towards Him. That is, they were becoming more and more hostile towards Him. They were not prepared to repent, to hear and do what Jesus said. Therefore, they didn't get what Jesus was trying to tell them. Hence, Jesus told them parables, to fulfill what the prophets had said about the coming of the messiah: They will hear him and yet not understand. They will see him and yet be blind that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God.
- The proof was, that nobody from the crowd asked Jesus for an explanation of the

parables, except His disciples. They asked Him and they received the code to understand the parables. Jesus begins to make a clear distinction between “those outside” and “those inside”.

- “Those outside”, correspond with all the cases where people heard Him but no fruit came forth. “Those inside” corresponds with Jesus disciples who received the Word of Jesus, realised that they didn’t understand the mystery, and therefore ask Him, trusted Him to tell them. They didn’t take the parable and moved on trusting on themselves to find the right explanation. No. They basically repented, they realised that they were the poor in the spirit when they realised that they couldn’t understand it, but wanted to know and therefore depended on Jesus to explain it to them, which He did.

- This is so important for our times, “those outside” are those who don’t want to be taught by Jesus! “Those outside”- the seed falling on non-fertile ground- are those who think that they don’t need to be taught by Jesus’ Word. The Word of Jesus, especially the parables, need to be explained properly. One needs to want to know, the desire to know and understand what Jesus is actually saying reveals trust in Him. Anyone who is not interested in learning from Him, will never get what He says.

- And that is why Jesus tells them parables, to prove to them, that they are not interested enough to ask Him for the right explanation. They think they can figure it out by themselves, or even worse, they are indifferent, they don’t care what the Word means!

- What they don’t realise is, that they already come with a preconception of how the Kingdom of God works. Basically, they don’t want to have their way of perceiving the kingdom of God renewed. They refuse to learn the new way of God’s Kingdom coming in Christ!

- Therefore, they will be stuck in their blindness. They will overlook the Lamb of God that takes away all their sins. They will overlook the fact, that the Kingdom of God comes to them as a gift, as a seed being planted into their hearts, through their ears, which will grow its own new plant out of their innermost being.

- They need to become a new plant! They cannot stay who they are! God’s Grace does not work in this way that God allows the old plant to enter His kingdom. When harvest comes, only the fruit of the new plants will be harvested and gathered into God’s Kingdom. Any fruit of the old plant will not count as fruit. Merely changed lives is not enough!

• Not those whose old lives have changed will be found in the Kingdom of God, but those, whose old innermost being has died and has been crucified, who have received new hearts, which cling to Jesus to hear Him out. And therefore they will become hungry for what Jesus says and teaches and inspired by His teaching begin to produce fruit, namely, begin to forgive others as they have been forgiven. This can look like changing lives. But, the crux of the matter is, we need to become new persons with a new identity in our innermost being.

• The fact that Jesus spoke in parables to the hostile crowd underlines another very important issue. They had received the Word of Jesus, spoken in parables. So, the question arises, well, did they not receive the seed of Jesus? Is it not enough to just hear His Word?

• The answer is: It is not enough to simply receive the airwaves of the words flying through your ears without understanding properly what Jesus actually said!! Unless you understand what His Word truly means, you have not received His seed in your heart! The Word of Jesus packaged in a parable is like hot airwaves going through your ears and not entering the center stages of your innermost being. If you are happy with such an experience, and think, that was it and move on with your life, it shows that the Spirit of Jesus, His heart's desire, the intention He had on His mind, is not important for you! Its boils down to fake listening.

• Now, understanding Jesus' Word is also a gift of God, which is given to those who are in the receptive mode, to those who realise that they don't understand the mystery of the Kingdom of God, by any of their own faculties of power.

• So, we have to ask ourselves, today, have we maybe drifted off in becoming deaf, have we maybe drifted off in becoming indifferent to understanding the Word of Jesus, as if that is not important, as so many are teaching in our days, amongst Christianity? If this is the case, let us repent today and ask Jesus to give us His seed of forgiveness, and the gift of understanding what this means and entails. Lord, make us fruitful so that we will grow in repentance and faith, and let Your seed, Your Word, grow in our hearts, so that we will grow in understanding what immense gift you have given us, and let this seed of Yours grow into a full plant in us, which will bear the full grain, the full seed, to be harvested.

• Glory be to the Father, Glory be to the Son and Glory be to the Holy Spirit! **Amen.**

• *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.* [^{NKJ} 2 Cor3:14.]