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"His Seed, His Kingdom, His Growth"
Text: Mark 4:26-34; Ezekiel 17:22-24

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever planted a seed and hoped it *didn't* grow? That's ridiculous, right?

So it is with God and His Word. He wants those seeds that are planted by His pastors preaching His Word and by His people speaking His Word to grow and to bear fruit in the hearts and lives of those who hear. But *how* that happens, and *when*, and *where*, and *how much*, and *how big*, that is out of our control. And out of our understanding.

Sometimes we know why those seeds and plants do NOT grow and produce fruit. That was the point of a parable Jesus told right before the ones we heard today. Sometimes the cares of life choke the seed of His Word, or the trials and troubles of life scorch it, or the temptations of satan and the world pluck it out. You've probably experienced all those things in your own life. You're sitting in church and hearing the Word but your mind is a thousand miles away, worrying, obsessing, preoccupied. And the seed of the Word just bounces off your ears, heart, or mind, or is plucked or scorched.

But that's not the focus of the Word Jesus speaks to us today. Today it is rather *how* and *where* and *why* it DOES grow. And it does quite apart from us and our efforts.

Oh, to be sure, there are things we do to help. We plow the ground, we try to plant the seeds properly, we try to control the weeds and the pests, we apply fertilizer. But none of those things make the seed grow. That happens quite apart from us. In fact, you can do everything right and have nothing grow. Or, you wind up with some seeds that come up and some that don't. And wonder why?! Same seed, same garden, same care - why didn't it all come up? And then the plants that do . . . some produce a lot of fruit, while others produce very little. Why is that?

It is out of our control and beyond our understanding.

And so it is with the kingdom of God and the seed of His Word, Jesus says. And so these parables spoken to us today are not a call to action - what to do and how to do it to get the kingdom of God to grow; but rather a call to **TRUST**. That it's God's kingdom and God's seed and God's growth. Only He *can* do it.

Which is hard for us. It's hard to trust when what we really want to do is roll our sleeves up and get to work! To make things happen when and where and how we want them! And while, as Christians, we don't do nothing - we still speak God's Word and plant His seed, as we are called to do - but we also can't make it grow. So we are called to patience and trust. That maybe, just maybe, God knows what He's doing. And maybe, just maybe, it's not necessarily what we want or think.

Luther spoke to this. Just a couple of years after posting the 95 Theses, things were moving in Germany - but certainly not how Luther thought they would! He thought posting those Theses would lead to a theological debate among the theologians and faculty of the University - not to the movement that was spreading through Germany and not to His being called before the Emperor and then being excommunicated! The seed was working and growing far differently than he thought or ever could have imagined. And certainly more than he ever could have done himself.

And yet it wasn't moving *fast enough* for some others, including one Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt. Karlstadt was trying to lead the churches in Wittenberg while Luther was in protective custody in the Wartburg Castle after the Diet of Worms. But Karlstadt wanted things to move faster. He was trying to force the issue. But his actions weren't helping, but hurting. It was as if he was trying to help that little seedling - like the one on the cover of your bulletin today - grow, by pulling up on it to make it bigger! But you know what that does! That just kills it.

So Luther left the safety of the Wartburg and returned to Wittenberg and preached a series of sermons to try to calm things down. And he gave kind of a German twist on Jesus' parable that we heard today, saying: *I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word;* [that is, I just planted the seed] *otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word [did the work]. I did nothing; the Word did everything*.

But what about today? It certainly doesn't seem to be working like that today. Maybe that's frustrating, or disappointing to you. If you're like me, you'd rather be in control; have the kingdom of God grow how and where and when *I* want it to. *Like here!* I came here to this church 19 years ago and I thought, and if I had my way, we would have had more folks and our own building a long time ago. But here we are. Not as I planned. Not as I thought. Maybe we blame ourselves - we didn't do things right, or enough, or well enough. But while there is surely much we didn't do right or could have done better, it may just be that God's time is different than our time, and His ways different than our ways.

For the kingdom of God has grown here. Many people have come and gone and heard the Word. Maybe they grew here. Maybe they will grow more someplace else. But the

growth of a church is not the same as the growth of the kingdom of God. Individual churches grow and shrink, open and close, come and go - but the kingdom of God lasts forever; is bigger than any one church.

Or country. For think about the United States. The church and its influence seems to be declining here. But in Africa - where it flourished in the early church and produced some of the church's great theologians, but then suffered under the smothering and conquest of Islam - it is growing again. In South America it is growing, while in Europe it is largely ignored, and many huge, beautiful, glorious churches sit empty. How hard for us to understand that. Why some, not others. Why there, not here. Maybe impossible.

The seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.

So we are called to **TRUST**, to **HUMILITY**, and to **PATIENCE**. That's it's God's seed, God's kingdom, and God's growth, not ours. To pray in the Lord's Prayer **THY** kingdom come, and mean it. How and where and when He decides.

Which is hard. It's always been hard. We heard from the prophet Ezekiel today, words that he spoke while many of the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon, in the midst of their *70 years of exile* there; when they hadn't been there very long and still had a long time to go. Not what they had in mind.

But Ezekiel preaches what God was going to do. He was going to take a young, tender branch from the top of a tall, majestic cedar tree, and plant it. And it would grow, large and noble and produce much fruit. That tall, majestic cedar was King David, when Israel was at its greatest and most glorious. That young, tender branch, Jesus. But He would not be planted now, and not as soon as the people wanted. Only after Israel had been chopped down. *Very few* of the people who heard Ezekiel would be alive to go back to Jerusalem at the end of those 70 years. And none of them would be alive when that branch was planted in Jerusalem. They were called to TRUST. To trust the Word of the Lord. To trust their heavenly Father, that He would do it. And by such trust, that is, faith, in God their heavenly Father and His promises, they would be saved. Their sins forgiven, not held against them. And while they wouldn't get to see earthly Jerusalem again, they would get to live in the heavenly Jerusalem.

In fact, it took almost 600 years after Ezekiel spoke these words for that seed to be planted! God REALLY doesn't think and do as we do! And how little and insignificant that seed, that little branch. A young, unknown, virgin nobody from Nazareth, who wasn't even married. The little backwater town of Bethlehem. That birth didn't make the front page of the Bethlehem Post - Caesar's census and taxation was surely the headline that day! And the injustice of it all! That baby in the manger didn't catch anyone's attention . . . not at first; just a few shepherds, and who cares about them? Later King Herod noticed - that was news! When he killed a bunch of babies for seemingly no reason

other than his madness.

But what turned out greater? What still impacts the world today? What man did for his own kingdoms? Caesar and his tax? Herod and his insanity? Or that baby and what He did? When that Seed was planted and grew. When that young tender branch turned into a deadly cross. And when that Seed planted in the grave then grew again, into a tree spanning centuries and continents, and in which men, women, and children of every nation, tribe, people, and language find rest and refuge. A kingdom in which men, women, and children find forgiveness, life, and hope.

And into that kingdom, HIS kingdom, each of you have been brought. The seed planted by a faithful mother or father bringing you to be baptized. Or by a faithful mother, father, friend, or spouse speaking the Word to you. A seed that grew. That God caused to grow.

Maybe you've planted those seeds and haven't seen the growth you want; it doesn't seem to be working. But the *how*, the *when*, and the *where* is not up to you. We are called to trust, humility, and patience.

We are called to **TRUST**, that our heavenly Father wants all those seeds to grow, and is always working for the good of all people, and to repent that we don't always believe that.

We are called to **HUMILITY**, that we don't know and don't understand all that our heavenly Father is doing, and to repent when we think we do, or insist that He do things our way, or complain when He doesn't.

And we are called to **PATIENCE**, that maybe, like Israel, we'll never get to see the growth, that it will only happen after we are gone, and to repent of our impatience, our impulsiveness, our now or never thinking.

And to confess that God's Word is true. God's love is sure. And God's ways are best.

But also do not underestimate what you do, the seeds that you plant, and do not to give up. It may seem pretty small and insignificant, what you do, as small as, well, a tiny mustand seed in a pretty big world. But with such tiny seeds God is able to accomplish much. It is for us to plant, to speak the Word. It is for God to grant the growth.

And He has. And He will continue. As we drink deeply of His forgiveness and Word here, as we eat and drink the Son's Body and Blood. God is tending us and granting us growth. Maybe you don't feel it, see it, or understand it. But we're not called to those things, but to *trust*, to *humility*, and to *patience*. The seed, the Word, does its work. The Word that called all things into being in the beginning, the Word which became flesh and redeemed all of creation from sin, the Word proclaimed, poured, and fed to us here, and

the Word that will call us out of our graves on the Last Day to everlasting life.

That Word is living, active, and powerful. And working. We may not know how. We may not understand. But your Father in heaven does. And He is working. In us, and in the world. The kingdom of God growing. That as we just sang:

That in these gray and latter days,
There may be those whose life is praise,
Each life a high doxology
To Father, Son, Spirit (LSB #834 v. 4).
To the King, the Seed, and the Grower.
He is working, dear Christians.
Rest and be confident in Him.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.