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Matthew 13:1-23

Sow the seed; the kingdom will grow!

“Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: **19**When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. **20**The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. **21**But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. **22**The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. **23**But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

The kingdom of God occurred this week at VBS. Whenever the Word of God is sown, the kingdom grows. The kingdom of God grew in kids, parents, and even the helpers.

Proof of this occurred to me when one of the kids said to me, “Pastor, I don’t know how to believe and I really want to go to heaven. I asked him if the Bible was the word of God. He said yes. I asked him if God keeps his promises. He said yes. I asked him if he has been baptized. He said yes. I read to him Romans 6 and said, “God has promised that in baptism you are united to Jesus. You will be with Jesus in heaven. God has promised that to you!” The boy said, “And God keeps his promises!” The kingdom of God occurred this week.

In our reading from Matthew, Jesus tells a parable about the power of God’s Word to bring about the kingdom. Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God is like a man reaching into a bag, pulling out a handful of seed, and scattering it all over the ground. Some falls on the pavement, some among the rocks, some among the weeds, and some on the good soil.

At first glance, this parable seems a bit foolish. The sower does not act very carefully. He doesn’t seem to be a good steward of the seed. He doesn’t send off soil samples to the lab to see how receptive the soil will be and what the yield will be. He doesn’t read a book on growth. He doesn’t count the seed. There are no measurements. Instead, he simply takes handfuls of seed and scatters it all over the place. He doesn’t even seem to mind where the seed lands.

The sower of course is God. The seed is the Word, the gospel, Christ. The soil is the hearts of men and women. It is pretty amazing that when Jesus speaks of how God brings about the kingdom it is not as careful as one might think. God simply scatters the gospel all over the place, without regard for whether it lands on good, productive soil, rocks, weeds, or hard pavements. He simply casts out the Word and lets the Word do its thing. **Sow the seed; the kingdom will grow!**

For most of us, when we think about the kingdom of God we think of a mighty reign. We think about that glorious kingdom that is to come; the New Jerusalem. The place where there will be no more tears, pain, and death. This is a correct vision of the kingdom of God. However, the kingdom of God is more than a place in the future. The kingdom of God is the reign of Christ that breaks into our world through the Word of God.

That is why Jesus speaks of seeds in reference to the kingdom. Seeds are small. They begin disproportionately small compared to the enormous growth that occurs. The amazing thing about seeds is that it is all there in a tiny little nugget. Everything for a mustard plant is already there in the seed. When you plant a little mustard seed, you are planting the entire plant. There's nothing more to add.

A second thing about seeds is that they must disappear into the ground before growing. This illustrates the mysterious nature of the kingdom. Given our druthers we would rather the illustration of the kingdom be like a giant nail – driven into the world by a giant hammer in the hand of our giant God. Something noisy and noticeable. But a seed?

Third, seeds take time to grow. When my aunt was a child, she decided to grow carrots. She plowed a row in her parent's backyard. She planted the seeds into the ground. She watered them. The next day she woke and ran outside to see if the carrots had grown. She was devastated. She cried all day. My grandparents told her to be patient. The next night, my grandparents took carrots from the store and planted them into the ground. When my aunt awoke, she could not believe how big the carrots were.

I think all of us would like to see the kingdom of God sprout over night. There are instances of this. However, most of the time, it takes time. Seeds planted today are often harvested years from now.

Parents and grandparents, I cannot reiterate this enough. I know many of you have heartache over your children and grandchildren who have wandered away from the faith. God's word is powerful. Everything for their salvation - forgiveness, life, freedom, resurrection from the dead - is already fully there in that tiny little word of forgiveness spoken into their ears, that speck of Gospel read from a book, that splash of baptismal water, that tiny piece of bread and the small sip of wine. The seed of the Word is planted, and without our help, without our knowledge, it grows.

There was a young woman who came to church a few years ago. It was when Jamie was pregnant with Abigail. This woman was the daughter of a pastor. In college, she had a falling away from the faith. She decided to come to church for a midweek advent service. At the time, I wanted to cancel all such services because the attendance was low. However, we had the service. Afterwards, she thanked me for the service and shared a little of her struggle. I told her that God loved her. She cried. She came the next Wednesday and the next. She started attending on Sundays. Soon, she was even working in the church before she moved away.

Parents and grandparents, keep speaking the good news to you loved ones. Keep telling them that God loves them. Send them cards that tell of God's love. Send them cards like the ones I send you on the anniversary of your baptism. **Sow the seed; the kingdom will grow!**

Whenever preaching occurs, so too does opposition. In the parable, the opposition comes in the form of birds that steal the seed before they can be planted, persecution that wilts the plant, and the cares of the world that choke the fruit.

I would love to say that this opposition comes from those people outside of us. In part, that is true. However, we are saints and sinners. As fertile as our hearts are, they are still fallen. The opposition that arises often comes from within. The cares of this world have a way of consuming our thoughts. The radical nature of the gospel can at times be too radical for us.

Did you hear about the boy who came up to his pastor and said, “Pastor, I know God loves everyone, but he must not know my sister.” The gospel is hard to swallow at times. It is at these times when we turn our declaration into a question. Does the word sown really bring about the kingdom?

The answer is still yes! Though it is mysterious and though there is opposition, the word still accomplishes its goal! Think back to those birds. What do birds do after they eat seed? They excrete the seeds and from there plants grow. Sometimes those seeds grow on mountainsides filled with rocks. Have you ever seen a tree that grows out of a rock? They do! Sometimes the seed lands in the midst of thorns and still produces fruit. Of course, it is hard to get to the fruit when there are thorns. But I am talking about the kingdom of God.

Jesus knows how to get to the fruit even when there are thorns. Jesus wore thorns to get you. Jesus the true seed had to fall into the earth and die. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Jesus is the promised Seed of Abraham, the Seed through whom all nations of the earth would be blessed. He had to die and be buried like seed in the ground. But he was raised from the ground as a mighty vine. We are united to him – he the vine, we the branches. We produce fruit. **Sow the seed; the kingdom will grow!**

Conclusion

In August, I will be starting my eighth year of ministry at Reformation. How many of you were here on my first day? I have photos that Sam Giesy sent me of the members of this congregation. He sent them with names on the back so that I would know who there are when I arrived. I must admit, that seeing the photos scared me a bit. I realized just how few there really were. I also realized that there were three people under the age of 18 in the church (one was an employee). I remember wondering, how in the world could I be a pastor when the people of the church have been Christians longer than I had been alive? This really troubled me. Then I remembered this parable. My authority comes from the word, not the person. **Sow the seed; the kingdom will grow!**

**In Jesus' Name,
Amen**