

PENTECOST 4  
EZEKIEL 17:22-24  
2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-17  
MARK 4:26-34  
JUNE 16, 17, 2018

YEAR B

These verses are called parables of the kingdom. They give us valuable teachings about the kingdom of God. In our Lord's Prayer we pray that God's kingdom would come and that God's will is done. In Luther's explanation to this petition we teach that God's kingdom has come in the person of Jesus Christ but we also want the kingdom to come to us. We want to receive the kingdom of God. When Jesus prayed this prayer and taught his disciples to pray this prayer he spoke of the will of God and the kingdom of God in the same sentence. The kingdom of God does not come to us apart from the will of God being done in our lives. When we live apart from the will of God we cannot enjoy the benefits and the protection of the kingdom of God. When we live according to God's will and in God's kingdom we have the assurance of God's protection. Our Lord Jesus told this parable about the farmer sowing the seed and the parable of the mustard seed. Jesus told about the kingdom of God bearing fruit but also the kingdom of God being a place of protection and peace.

**Mark 4:26, 27** He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.

The kingdom of God is also the power and the authority of God. The verses preceding these in Mark 4 tell about listening to what you hear. Jesus says that any with ears to hear should also listen. We hear Jesus and others speak about listening to every word that comes from the mouth of God. We hear these or similar words on the mount of Transfiguration as Peter is talking about building tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. The voice said that they should listen to Jesus. We listen to

the word of God because that word brings the kingdom with all its power and authority. In the kingdom of God there is a place for any that want to come in.

Jesus told about a farmer that planted a crop and went about his normal daily activities but the seeds sprouted and grew without the farmer's help. As Jesus told the parable he said the farmer did not know how the crop grew. Many of us know about the process of how we get from seeds planted to a crop being harvested. Even when we know how it works we still marvel at the crop that is growing. Some of us enjoy driving through farming areas so we can see crops in a field. Thursday, I went to Des Moines for my class. It rained the entire time I was driving there in the morning. I recalled some of my farming friends telling me about welcoming rain after the crops have been planted. Those farmers might say there is not a rain they did not welcome. As I was coming home I saw fields that were under water because of the tremendous amounts of rain that fell in a short time. Farming requires a tremendous amount of faith. It requires the farmer to trust in the promises of God to provide what is needed for a good crop. Most farmers I know do not sit by idly waiting for crops to grow to maturity at the completion of the growing season. Most of the farmers I know tend to the crop because they know that unless they do the work required there would not be an abundant crop. The farmers still trust in the Lord to provide what is needed for the crop to grow but they also know the Lord requires them to do their part. The farmers know that God has given them abilities and responsibilities to do the work necessary for the nurture and care even when God is doing the good work among them.

**Mark 4:28, 29 The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."**

Jesus spoke about the farmer planting and then going in each night and sleeping. The crop grows and he does not know how. He is sent in with the equipment for the harvest. Even though our gospel lesson does not talk about the work of the farmer before the harvest we know that the farmer has responsibility for the crops. The same is true of any pastor or teacher of God's word. I cannot make anyone listen to my sermons or come to the Bible studies I am leading. Our Sunday School teachers might teach but they cannot force anyone to learn. We cannot force anyone to have a stronger faith or to grow in his or her relationship with God. We must never pretend to have the ability to do what is God's to do. It is God that allows the crops of your faith to mature and bear fruit. It is God that allows you to grow yet I have responsibilities and abilities in this process of faith development and I have a part in the harvest. The seeds of our lives are the word of God. The planting of seeds happens in worship services where God's word is proclaimed in truth and in Bible studies where we are honest about our discussions. The crop of our faith is nurtured as we minister to the people in need even when that ministry is not pleasant or when things do not go the way we wanted or planned. We do the difficult work of ridding our lives of the things that are harmful to our life of faith. We also help others rid their lives of things that are stumbling blocks. As your pastor nurturing your faith is more than what you see on Saturday or Sunday or Wednesday. Nurturing your faith is about being kind and available to you when you are hurting but also at other times.

**Mark 4:33, 34** With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Each of you has a place in this ministry and you have responsibility for caring for others. You can't just plant a seed and expect it to grow. Our Lord Jesus planted many seeds into the lives of his disciples. He planted

those seeds but then continued to teach and preach. When they didn't get what he was saying he took them aside and taught them. He did not scold them for not getting it but he continued to teach them so they would get it. Once or twice in the gospels we see that Jesus admonish them for not using their faith but he never scolds them for something they do not understand.

The truth is that our Lord also takes us aside when we do not understand. God takes us aside and teaches what we do not get. The seeds are planted and they grow and we are amazed that they grow. When we are faithful in our lives of faith we will see the fruit of our efforts. We might not know how it happened but we will know that it was and is God's doing. Our task is to remain faithful and do what our Lord asks us to do. We bear fruit and we allow others to bear fruit but we give glory to God. AMEN