

LET'S GET CRAZY!
3rd Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Steven D. Spencer - Pastor
Mark 4:26-34

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, amen.

You just know that summer is here. It's getting hot and humid. The smell of fireworks has already begun to fill the air. Soon "4th of July" and grills will be ablaze. And of course it's that time in the church year for parables. Especially parables of the soil.

Parables are fun; they're an innovative way to teach. Jesus used parables when people stopped listening to Him. Parables are earthy, everyday things about seed and soil and grain and mustard plants these are little analogies that share the very big things of God. It's about His kingdom, His grace, and of course His judgment. Parables require "ears to hear," which is another way of saying "faith." Without faith parables are just nonsense. They invite us to trust Jesus and to act on what Jesus teaches. And so this morning, we are given a couple of kingdom parables for our consideration.

"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scattered seed on the ground." The scattering was dealt with in the Jesus first parable, the parable of soil. That's the parable where the sower walks along, reaches into a bag, pulls out a handful of seed, and scatters it all over the place. Some falls on the road, some among the rocks, some among the weeds, and some on the good soil.

So the first thing we notice right away about the sower is that he is pretty casual when it comes to sowing seed. He doesn't do any soil surveys. He doesn't send off soil samples to a University to see whether it will support seed. He doesn't count the seed. No careful measurements. He takes handfuls of unnumbered seed and scatters it all over the place, and doesn't seem to care where they land.

Now when you realize that the seed is the Word, and Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, and the soil is the hearts of men and women, you start to get a picture of how God operates His kingdom in the world. He scatters the Word of Christ all over the place, without any regard for whether it lands on good, productive soil, rocks, weeds, or hard pavement. And then the Word does His thing, "Automatically".

Can you imagine if a church took this parable seriously? Can you imagine a church that would sow the Word of Christ recklessly, without concern for where it lands? Can you imagine Christians going out into the world to proclaim Jesus as Christ in their various callings, and not being terribly concerned about who hears it, or if people are "ready" to hear it, or if they would perhaps respond favorably? Can you imagine what would happen if baptized believers simply started sowing the seed of Christ's Word?

But why don't we? Maybe fear is one reason. But I think the chief reason is that we really don't trust the Word to do its thing. We think we have to help the Word along. We think we need to cultivate the soil. Do some digging and analyzing and weeding. Measure our sowing efficiency. But that's not how things work in the parable. The sower sows his seed with a kind of joyful reckless abandon, and then when his seed bag is empty, he retires to the house, grabs a cup of coffee, puts up his feet, watches a some TV. He sleeps, he gets up, and tends to his chores. And the seed sown in the ground sprouts and grows, and the sower has no idea how it all worked. And he doesn't have to know.

Our Lutheran Confessions say something similar when they speak of the ministry of the Gospel and the Sacraments. *"Through these means, the Holy Spirit works faith when and where it pleases Him in those who hear the Gospel."* How it works, we have no idea. It works, that's all we need to know. And the Word does the work. It never returns empty; it always accomplishes the purpose for which God sowed it. The Spirit works faith in the heart of those who hear the Gospel. The church's task, our task together, is to have people hear the Gospel. We scatter the seed. You don't need to understand how it works. In fact, you can't understand how it

works. The seed just needs to be sown, that's all of it. No programs, processes, workshops or analysis just sowing.

The rest happens automatically. All by itself, without any input from us, the seed produces grain - the stalk, the head, the full kernel, and then the harvest. But you're not going to see any harvest if you don't take the seed out of the bag and scatter it on the soil.

Seed left in the bag doesn't accomplish anything. I had some grass seed I had forgotten about. I placed it in a coffee can and stored away in my shed. This last spring I came upon this grass container and opened it. Some of the seed sprouted and died, most of it rotted. There was a layer of mold on top. A horrific smell came out of that can. That's what happens when you don't scatter seed into soil.

The seed of the Word grows and produces fruit in being scattered - being preached, proclaimed and spoken. It's scattered when pastors preach and missionaries go out in the mission field. And it's also scattered when you are scattered from here out beyond those church doors, with seed bags full of ripe, fruitful seed and God's benediction. You are missionaries It's scattered when you tell someone else about the hope that is within you, when you teach another about Christ, when you lead someone to righteousness, when you point someone to Baptism, or to the Lord's Supper or to the forgiveness of their sins. When you say to another, "Jesus died for your sins, for your life, for your freedom. He has won for you the ultimate liberty - freedom from condemnation, from hell, from yourself."

I've been thinking about these things for a few weeks. I've been wondering why I decided to go into the ministry in the first place. I look back to several years ago, and wonder what was it that pushed me out of a comfortable life to finish my education and go out into the mission field of the world. And I remembered what it was. It wasn't the chance to wear cool black clothing or chant ancient liturgies or study dead languages or learn time honored doctrines, although that's been fun. But that wasn't what propelled me into the ministry.

It was seeing the Word at work in the lives of people, literally killing them and making them alive. It was seeing that the Gospel really is the power of God for salvation. It packs divine punch to turn people from death to life, from sin to Christ. It was being a part, an instrument, in someone's rebirth to faith in Jesus. Seeing someone brought out of the darkness of unbelief into the light of faith. It's Conversion! That's what propelled me into the ministry. As a pastor much of my work is trying to keep Christians - Christian. It's like the difference between planting a garden and the on going task of watering and weeding it.

Conversions are what inspire a complacent and comfortable church, as well. There's nothing like a bunch of new converts to liven things up! That's what happened to the church at Antioch, the church that sent Paul on his three missionary journeys recorded in Acts. There's no harvest without some sowing of the Word, some sowing on hearts through the ears. Thus far this year we've had only 1 baptism. I don't think we should be satisfied with that. We ought to expect a richer harvest. The Word works, you know. We need to be sowing that seed now if there's going to be a harvest next year.

The Word of Christ doesn't seem like very much, does it? Not impressive as the world measures impressive things. But don't be fooled. Seeds may be small, but they pack quite a punch. Consider the mustard seed, Jesus says. When sown, it's among the smallest of seeds. Yet when it's planted, it sprouts and grows into a bush that even has room for the birds.

The amazing thing about seed is that it's all there in that tiny little bundle. 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. Everything for your salvation - forgiveness, life, freedom, resurrection from the dead - is already fully there is that tiny little word of forgiveness spoken into your 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, automatically, all by itself, it grows. And what starts out as a small, insignificant planting - a seed dropped into soil - grows into something far greater than we could ever have imagined.

But first the seed must die. Jesus said, *“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.”* He was of course referring to His own death on the cross. He 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. If Jesus hadn’t died, there be no fruit, no forgiveness, no life, no salvation. You’d be left to earn goody points with God and hoping for the best. There would be no way to escape the heavy hand of the Law. No fellowship with God. No freedom. No worship. Nothing but sin, death, and hell, had not Jesus died.

The seed needs to die, to be buried in order to fulfill its purpose. You need to die too. Die every day in your Baptism as the implanted Word has its way with you. You must die to sin and self and to all the ways you try to be your own God. Each day you must rise up into new life in Jesus. Dying and rising is the way of the seed, it’s the way of Christ and His kingdom. Scattered seeds that die to live!

We might think we are insignificant here at Messiah. Just a small group of believers gathered each Sunday morning. As a group we represent less than 1/4 of a 1 percent of the City of Salem’s population. We’re mustard seed sized. I would remind you that the seed of the church, the first group of believers was only slightly larger - about 120. But the Word preached through that little church at Pentecost sprouted to a harvest of 3000 in a single day, and filled the Mediterranean world with the Gospel by the close of its century. Don’t think for a heartbeat that we are too small or insignificant.

Our bags are full of good seed provided by the Divine Sower Himself. Now scatter it. Fearlessly, recklessly, in the confidence that it will grow and produce fruit, all by itself, just as it has in you. It’s time to get crazy for Jesus sake, for you are His missionaries and the world is your mission.

In Jesus name, Amen and amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, amen.