

October 17, 2021

*"The Growing Seed"*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Mark 4:26-29

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We've all done it, or watched our children or grandchildren do it. That is, take a seed and plant it and then wait for it to grow. We nourish it with some water, make sure it gets sunlight, and that's about it, we do little else. And I'm sure in the back of our mind there is a certain amount of marvel associated with what we're doing – making something grow and flourish. But, for the most part, we take it for granted. Because as time passes, the seed eventually does grow. Out of the ground comes first a little stem, then the bud, and then the flower. Children especially are so excited with their accomplishment. "Look Mommy at what I did!" And truly, how pleasing and satisfying is that? Yet, we really don't think much about what lies behind all this – that there is some divine power at work. We just let that wonderful mystery be.

I'm familiar with this because as a farm girl growing up in Indiana, seven months of the year, I could look out the windows of our house and literally see nothing but acres and acres of open fields. Then in the spring, the corn planting would begin. Things still looked the same for a while, and time would pass, I'd go to school, play with my friends, the sun would shine and the rain would fall, and then one day all those brown fields would suddenly change color, showing just a hint of green. All of them, at about the same time. Slowly but surely stalks would rise out of the ground, then in time, the head would form, then the grain, the ear of corn would grow and eventually it would be harvest time. For the farmers, I'm sure in the back of their minds there was a certain amount of marvel associated with what was happening, but here as well, they just let this wonderful mystery be.

As I was writing these words I thought of an even greater case in point. A man and woman come together. A seed is planted. Soon she says, "Honey, guess what?" "What?" he asks. "We're going to have a baby!" "Oh that's wonderful!" he says. Over time a little head and limbs and body forms, and nine months later a miracle occurs. Everyone is so excited and busy with the new baby that no one takes time to acknowledge the power that designed all this. Again, we just let this wonderful mystery be.

So now to today's Parable of the Growing Seed, which is only recorded in the Gospel of Mark. It's very short yet it's powerful in its meaning. So first let's put it in context. It comes after the Parable of the Sower, which you're probably familiar with. It's in three of the gospels, but let me quickly review it for you. It's where God, the sower, scatters seed on the ground, hoping it takes root. The seed represents the Word of God and the ground represents the hearts of men and women everywhere. Some of God's

words fall on hardened ground, hardened hearts, and never take root. We see a lot of hard ground out there in the world today with the way people treat each other and all the dysfunction that exists. I feel so sorry for those who don't know the peace and comfort that having Jesus Christ in their lives can give them, and that's why, as his disciples, we still have work to do. Now some seed falls on rocky and shallow soil, takes root, but then quickly dies because of a lack of depth. You see, we have to nurture our faith. Other seeds fall on ground where weeds are growing, and the weeds, representing the material things of this world that entice us with pleasure, choke out anything that God tries to grow in our hearts. But, finally, some seed falls on the good soil of our hearts, and takes deep root within, and yields good grain, good fruit: thirty, sixty, and even a hundred fold. Fruits like joy and peace, and patience and kindness and generosity and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control and love. Especially, love.

So then, what's this little follow up parable of The Growing Seed all about? Well, it's effectively the cherry on top of the cake. I'll read it again because it was so short. "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A farmer scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. By itself the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. And when the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

Now I'll paraphrase it to make it easier to understand. It's about the Kingdom of God, which is best summarized as that place and time where God rules forever. Where all those fruits like love, peace and joy will reign. Where there will be no pain or sorrow or tears. I'll describe it as heaven. And in this parable, Jesus is saying that God's word is the seed that is scattered on our hearts. On our hearts of good soil, that we are to nurture. And time passes, night and day as the parable states, that time being our lifespan. And the seed, our faith, grows and becomes strong and finally, someday, will be ready for harvest. In its simplest form, this parable is all about that mystery I referred to earlier. Where there is a divine power at work in us. A divine force that is meant to guide us and sustain us in our lives. If we just tap into that force. You see, the first parable, the Parable of the Sower teaches us that we are responsible for preparing our hearts, nurturing our hearts to receive God's word, to hear God, to obey God. And then, this parable assures us that if we do nurture God's word within us, then heaven does indeed await us at the end of our lives. It will happen for us just assuredly as every flower, every blade of grass, every spear of wheat, every stalk of corn, every newborn baby, is a mystery of divine power whose secret working we can never begin to comprehend. This is the assurance of our ultimate redemption and salvation.

Now obviously this is a wonderful comfort and promise for us. But there's more. It is also a lesson about our faith. How we must have faith that God is at work in our lives even when we can't see or understand. We've all had times when we've felt discouraged. It could be our own faith – those times when we just don't feel connected to God, we feel like something is missing, God doesn't seem to be answering or doing anything. Or we feel like we've tried to plant the seeds of faith with our children or grandchildren, and nothing changes, nothing we do or say seems to matter. We wonder if it's even worth trying. Yes sometimes we feel our hearts or the hearts of those we love are hardened. But consider this. How many times have you walked along a sidewalk – on that cold, dirty, hardened concrete. And suddenly you come upon a crack and through that crack a green blade, even a flower has shot up, growth and life coming out of the seemingly impossible. And you marvel – how did that grow there? And we just let the mystery be. But that is the way God works in us when we have faith. Yes, over time, God does work in God's way for God's plan for your life. Bishop Robert Barron puts this lesson so eloquently. "Faith is an attitude of trust in the presence of God. Faith is openness to what God will reveal and do. All of us have been wounded, indeed our entire world compromised, by a battle that took place at a more fundamental level of existence. The result is sin, which we all know too well. Who alone could possibly take it on? A merely human figure? Hardly. What is required is the power and authority of the Creator himself, intent on remaking and saving his world, binding up its wounds, and setting it right. One of the most basic statements about faith is this: your life is not about you. You're not in control. This is not your project. Rather, you are part of God's great design. To believe this in your bones and act accordingly is to have faith. When we operate out of this transformed vision, amazing things can happen, for we have surrendered to a power already at work in us that can do infinitely more than we can ever ask or imagine." You see, when we have that kind of faith, God will bring forth fruit out of our lives – thirty, sixty, a hundred fold!

And then ultimately this faith assures us the Kingdom of God will be ours. As St. Paul tells us in the Message version of the Bible, "We are citizens of the high heaven! We are awaiting the arrival of the Savior, the Master, Jesus Christ, who will transform our earthy bodies into glorious bodies like his own. He'll make us beautiful and whole with the same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be, under and around him." The same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be; every flower, every blade of grass, every spear of wheat, every stalk of corn, every newborn baby, even you and me. That being the case then, I'll wait my turn and just let the final mystery be.