Pentecost 4 Mark 4:26-34
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"We WORK by Faith"
I. Faith that God's Word works.
II. Faith that God's Church is growing.

Dear Christian friends,

I'm sure you've heard the passage, ***"We walk by faith and not by sight."*** The longer you live the more you learn HOW TRUE that is. How we'd love to live BY SIGHT – **even if only** once in a while! We BELIEVE that God is good – **kind** – **wise** – loving – forgiving. We BELIEVE that God is taking care of us and working all things for our eternal good. We BELIEVE that but it doesn't always LOOK like that. **Sometimes** we'd rather shout, "WHERE are You, God?" Oh, that's right, ***"We walk BY FAITH and NOT by sight."***

With these parables Jesus teaches us that we also "**WORK** BY FAITH" and not by sight. **We work** with the faith that 1)God's Word works and 2)that God's Church is growing.

I. The faith that God's Word works.

We have here A SAMPLE of Jesus' parables. **With parables** Jesus used something familiar from **everyday life** to ILLUSTRATE a spiritual truth. These parables are about ***"the kingdom of God."*** Now ***"the kingdom of God"*** is not a SPECIFIC PLACE like an earthly kingdom. ***"The kingdom of God"*** is a SPIRITUAL kingdom – God ruling in our hearts and lives through His Word.

Jesus' first parable illustrates that **in God's kingdom** we WORK WITH THE FAITH that God's Word works. ***"The kingdom of God is like"*** a farmer planting his fields. You don't plant **on Monday** and harvest on Tuesday. You plant and THEN YOU WAIT – wait for months! You plant and TRUST that a crop will follow EVENTUALLY. You plant and THEN KEEP BUSY with other things. ***"While he sleeps and rises, night and day the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. When the crop is ready, he swings the sickle without delay, because the harvest has come."***

The seed is God's Word – or as Peter wrote, ***"You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God."*** BIG LESSON here! There is no growth WITHOUT God's Word. If you don't plant corn **in the spring** don't expect to HARVEST any corn in the fall. You can work up your **fields** - spray and fertilize them – you can buy the seed. But if you DON'T ACTUALLY PLANT the seed you won't harvest a **crop**.

If a person ISN'T IN God's Word you can't expect that person TO BE a Christian or TO LIVE a **Christian** life producing ***"fruits of faith."*** God's Word **isn't** GETTING TO WORK on that person's heart. Like an UNPLANTED FIELD there **will be** all kinds of weeds growing in that person's life. **Weeds** of greed – selfishness – worry – **fear** – **lust** – **drunkenness** – jealousy, etc.

God's Word needs to **be used** for a PERSON TO HAVE a living, growing FRUITFUL faith. God's Word is planted when we faithfully come to church each week – when we have daily devotions during the week. God's **Word is planted** in Sunday school – Bible class – confirmation class – our Christian grade school and high schools.

So we use God's Word and TRUST that **it works**. We don't always see IMMEDIATE RESULTS – in our own lives – in our congregation – in the **mission field**. We can get discouraged and **frustrated**. We need to remember that we WORK ***"by faith and not by sight."***

Take **your own life**. Would you like to be MORE CONFIDENT in your relationship with God – **more sure** that God really does love you and has forgiven you – that God **really** is taking care of you – less stressed out by **life's problems** and **fears** – that you really are going **straight** to heaven when you die?

The ONLY WAY for **that to happen** is BY USING God's Word – not HIT-OR-MISS but diligently – DAILY. But the growth – the **change** – won't happen OVER NIGHT. **Sometimes** it may seem **as if** it ISN'T DOING ANY GOOD coming to church or **having** those devotions. **Sometimes** we can come to **church** – come to **Communion** – and be SO REFRESHED and RENEWED and AT PEACE and by Monday night we're TOTALLY DRAINED and **wiped out**.

We use God's Word TRUSTING that it **works**. And it DOES – OVER TIME. ***"Night and day the seed sprouts and grows… first the blade, then the head, then the full grain in the head."*** Look at your own life and see God's Word AT WORK. The ONLY REASON you are a Christian – that you have stayed a Christian **over the years** and through how many **trials** and **temptations** – is because God's Word was planted in your heart AND IT'S GROWING. The ONLY REASON you are concerned about living a **God-pleasing** life – that you want others to know about Jesus – is because God's Word was planted in your heart AND IT'S WORKING.

With these parables Jesus is telling us to SEE THINGS AS GOD sees them. We might see only the ***"seed"*** and think WHAT GOOD will this do. GOD SEES the bountiful harvest that **comes later on**. Or in this second parable – we might see how small the ***"mustard seed"*** is and think NOTHING BIG **will ever come** of it. GOD SEES the full-grown plant that springs from that **little** seed. Yes, we WORK by faith –

II. Faith that God's Church is growing.

"The kingdom of God… is like a mustard seed, which… is one of the smallest of all the seeds planted in the ground. Yet WHEN IT IS PLANTED, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches so that the birds of the sky can nest under its shade."

Jesus is telling us DON'T BE FOOLED by **appearances**. The tiny ***"mustard seed"*** doesn't just grow **as big as** a tomato plant. It can grow up to 6 – 8 – 10 FEET HIGH. It can have branches BIG ENOUGH for birds to perch on. You WOULD NEVER THINK a plant that big **comes** from a SEED SO SMALL but it does!

We WORK by faith and plant **God's Word**. The seed God has given us SEEMS SO SMALL. An old Book – some water – bread and wine. What good can they do? We trust that God's Church IS GROWING.

Doing what JESUS TELLS us to do – preach and **teach** the gospel – baptize – come often to Communion – tell others about Him – invite people to church – train and **send missionaries** all over the place – sometimes that seems like a LOST CAUSE. We can EASILY SEE things going wrong. **Look how many** members aren't in church – HAVEN'T COME BACK **even with** the pandemic easing. They're working and out shopping etc., but **not back** to church. Children and adults get confirmed and you DON'T SEE **many** of them again. We live SO WELL OFF **compared to others** but the church struggles to pay its bills. Where ARE THE RESULTS of **mission work** and **Christian education**? Some think the church needs to do things DIFFERENTLY – we need to change **with the times**. Yes, we don't need **German** church services any more. The language we use **may change** but THE MESSAGE dare not be changed NO MATTER WHAT **language is used**.

Jesus tells us to TRUST that His Church is growing. God's Word seems SO TINY – like that ***"mustard seed."*** WHAT GOOD can come of it? We are to CLEARLY preach God's law – God DEMANDS that we be holy **every minute** of our lives. God CLAIMS total control of **every area** of our lives. Telling people they're SUCH ROTTEN sinners that the only thing GOD OWES us is a life that's hell followed by an eternity in hell – that UPSETS people and turns them off. They don't want to hear that. Yet GOD SAYS we must clearly preach His commandments to CONVICT and CRUSH **stubborn** sinners.

We are to also clearly preach God's gospel – that GOOD NEWS of Jesus. It's such a SIMPLE message. **Jesus** of Nazareth is God Himself – the **eternal Son** of God – born one of us. Jesus took the place of **all people** under God's law and has taken care of **everything** to save us. Jesus actually lived a **life holy** in every way – He perfectly obeyed every commandment – and He GIVES US all the credit for it. Jesus – the innocent, sinless Son of God – was punished for the sins of the whole world. Jesus suffered and died on the cross to PERSONALLY PAY for all our sins in full. **Three days later** Jesus rose from the dead – He came out of His grave alive and victorious. BECAUSE OF JESUS God has forgiven all our sins. TRUSTING in Jesus we have peace with God and we are going straight to heaven when we die. **Some people** think, "I've heard all that **before**. Tell me SOMETHING NEW!" **Others** think it's **nothing more** than a FAIRY TALE.

Jesus tells us to baptize and we see a person get a LITTLE WET. **Jesus tells** us to eat and drink some bread and wine – it's certainly not enough to FILL you up! Some think **all it does** is make church LAST LONGER.

Look again at that ***"mustard seed"*** – SO SMALL! – yet see it grow SO BIG! That simple gospel in Word and Sacraments is ***"the power of God unto salvation."*** Paul tells us that ***"God chose the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise. He chose the weak things of the world to put to shame the strong."***

God's Church IS GROWING! **You** and I are living proof. **That anyone** IS A CHRISTIAN is proof that the Church is growing. God shows us the END RESULTS in Revelation – ***"a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne of God"*** in heaven. Don't just see WHO'S NOT in church – see all who are. **Don't just see** who's ALL FALLEN AWAY from Jesus – **see all** who have stayed true to Jesus and are growing in their faith. **Don't just see** BILLS to be paid – **see also** generous gifts given. EVERY ONE of those people and **gifts** and **fruits** ALL BECAUSE and ONLY BECAUSE the **gospel works**. Are there things we can FINE TUNE or **do better**? There's always room for improvement. But there is NO IMPROVING on the gospel. There are NO SUBSTITUTES for the gospel.

"With many similar parables (Jesus) continued to speak the word to them, as much as they were able to hear." We could say Jesus KEPT PLUGGING along – preaching and teaching – CONFIDENTLY PLANTING the seed. Jesus calls us to now WORK FOR HIM – **to work** BY FAITH – TRUSTING that His Word works and that His Church is growing. Amen.

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