

Sermon Notes for Mark 4:26-29, Epiphany V

1. Only God can produce life. He does this through seed, both physical and spiritual. At creation God put seed into plants, animals and human beings for reproduction. See Genesis 1:11, 12, 19. A man plants seed in a woman. It produces life. Likewise, the Word of God, the Gospel, is seed, Luke 8:11. It produces spiritual life. See I Peter 1:23; John 6:63; Romans 1:16; I Peter 1:3; John 1:13; James 1:18; John 5:24-29.
2. The Law of God cannot make alive or give life. Galatians 3:21. The Law shows us our sin and is a guide for holy living. Good works are the fruit and result of life, not the cause of it. Ephesians 2:10.
3. Our text is a parable. "Parable" is a Greek word which means "two things laid side by side." The lesson lies in the points which the two have in common. Here the Word of God is compared to the sowing, germination, mysterious growth, spontaneous maturing and harvest of small grain, wheat or barley. When we find the points of comparison, we have found the lessons which Jesus wants us to learn.
4. Jesus' parables found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are always about the Kingdom of God. Jesus said at John 18: "My Kingdom is not of this world. . . . My Kingdom is not from here. . . . I am a King. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I came into the world, to bear witness to the Truth." In the Kingdom of God here on earth we use ONLY the Word of God, not force of law. Jesus is head of this kingdom. All members, also pastors, are merely lowly servants. The kingdom is found where there is faith in Christ and where the Word of God and the Sacraments are administered correctly.
5. All over the earth people understand the principle of sowing seed so that there can be plants or trees. All over the earth people understand the principle that man cannot make seed germinate and mature. That is a mystery known only to God. All over the earth people understand the principle of the ground of its own accord causing growth and the imperceptible stages in growth and maturation. All over the earth people understand the principle of harvest following the maturation of the plant. All this is applicable in the preaching of the Gospel, the good news of Christ crucified, resurrected and ascended. We must preach and teach the Gospel. We cannot understand its germination, growth and maturation. But it will surely bring its harvest.
6. When we teach and preach the Gospel, like the farmer we must wait patiently for the crop. James 5:7. St. Paul said that we plant and water but only God can make the Word grow. I Corinthians 3:6-7. The Gospel causes spiritual life both in converting sinners and causing them to live a Christian life. Luke 8:11, 12, 15. The Gospel alone causes conversion. James 1:18; I Peter 1:23-25.
7. Verse 28 says that the earth, of its own accord, bears fruit. In application Jesus is not saying that human beings, of their own accord, produce spiritual fruit. Human beings, of themselves, are spiritually blind, dead and enemies of God. Only the Gospel is the power of God to salvation. Read verse 28 in its entirety. The point is that the germination of the seed and the gradual development of the plant from stage to stage is a great mystery to man. Only God knows.
8. A Christian lives in two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world, also known as the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of power. In the kingdom of God the Christian is a citizen of heaven. In the kingdom of this world he is a citizen of a specific country. Both kingdoms are established by God. They must work together but must remain separate from each other. The members of the kingdom of God are servants, using only the Word of God as instrument. In the kingdom of this world some rule, others are ruled. They use the force of law as instrument. Romans 13:1-7; Philippians 3:20.
9. The Lutheran Church is often called The Evangelical Lutheran Church. The word "evangelical" means that the Gospel is their main instrument.

Sermon Outline for Mark 4:26-29, Epiphany V

Theme: THE ACTIVITY OF THE WORD OF GOD

Introduction: Luther says, with reference to the second petition of the Lord's Prayer: "The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, of itself; but we pray in this petition that it may come unto us also." The phrase "the Word of God" does not occur in our text. But the word "Seed" occurs in verses 26 and 27. The parable of the sower is the mother of all parables, Mark 4:3-20. The seed is plainly the Word of God.

- I. **IT MUST BE SOWED.** Preaching and teaching is to church work what sowing seed is to farming. It is absolutely necessary. Jesus sent His disciples on a preaching tour. He said: "Go and preach, saying 'The kingdom of heaven is near'." Matthew 10:7. He told the seventy: "Say 'Know this that the Kingdom of God is near'." Luke 10:11. He told the church: "Go and teach all nations." Matthew 28:19. Paul told Timothy: "Preach the Word." II Timothy 4:2. Jesus went about preaching and teaching for three years. Peter and Paul, throughout the Book of Acts, preached the Word from Jerusalem to Rome. Since their time the Word has been preached all over the world. The preacher is to the church what the farmer is to the field.
- II. **IT MUST GERMINATE AND GROW.** Luke 8:11: "The seed is the Word of God." It contains life. Like seed in a woman's womb or seed in the earth, it contains life. Only God can give life through seed. It is a miracle which fascinates us. Our text says: "The man sleeps and rises night and day and the seed germinates and grows in a way that he does not understand." When I preach and teach I introduce a miracle of God which causes awe and wonder. I sow and leave the rest to God. I should not worry and fret. God will cause germination and growth. Verse 28 describes the growth of the plant after it has germinated. First the blade, then the stalk, then the grain in the ear. The plant passes imperceptibly from one stage of growth to the next. The preacher watches the growth of the seed of the Word which he has sowed. He baptizes people. Then he instructs them. He preaches every Sunday. He calls on the sick. He counsels people in his studyroom. He watches the Word grow in his congregation. He watches the people grow in their need for the forgiveness of sins in the Gospel. He watches the people grow in their Christian living. They grow in love, patience, endurance, self-control. He watches Christian families grow in their care for each other. All because of the sowing of the seed of the Word.
- III. **IT WILL YIELD A HARVEST.** Verse 29 speaks about the harvest. The final purpose of all farming and gardening is the harvest. It is a joyous time, the time of ingathering of the fruit. Read all of Isaiah 55, especially verses 10-11. Verse 11 reads: "So shall My Word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." For some people the harvest comes already at death. Read Genesis 25:8-17; 35:29; 49:33. Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob died and were gathered to their people. That means they went to heaven. Stephen said: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Acts 7:59. He went to heaven. Paul spoke of the crown of righteousness which the Lord would give him. II Timothy 4:8. That means everlasting life at the time of death. God promises: "Be faithful to death and I will give you the crown of life." Revelations 2:10. But the great harvest will come on Judgment Day when all nations will be called before the Lord's great throne. Matthew 25:31-46. The Lord will divide all of mankind into two groups. The sheep will enter life everlasting. The goats will enter everlasting punishment.

Conclusion: Jesus' parable is very clear. Pastors must preach the Word. The people must come to hear the Word. Pastors must teach confirmation classes and comfort the sick and dying. Parents must help teach their children. The seed of the Word must constantly be sowed so that it may grow and to cause a harvest at the end.