

St. Timothy Chapel-LTS  
Thursday in Sexagesima Week

Tshwane, South Africa  
3 March 2011

Preaching Text Mark 4:26-29

Psalm 67

Hymn: "Spread the Reign of God the Lord"- 830 LSB

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, by your Word and Spirit give us ears to hear and hearts to trust Your saving Gospel. Preserve us in patience and steadfastness that we may faithful servants of Your Word and by Your grace reap the harvest of righteousness. Hear us, Lord Jesus, for your name's sake. Amen.

From our exegetical studies of the Gospel according to Mark we know that one of the evangelist's identifying phrases is "and immediately." Fast paced and full of action, Mark narrates the story of Jesus as He moves toward Calvary. With a brisk clip, Mark often tells in abbreviated fashion what Matthew and Luke spell out with greater detail. But at this juncture, Mark slows down just a bit as he unpacks the parable of the Sower and the seed. In the mini-parable which is our text, he does not rush forward but instead gives us space to pause and ponder the silent and slow working of God's Word. Brief and ever to the point, Mark records the words of the Lord that tell us of God's Kingdom. A kingdom that is like a farmer who goes out and scatters the seed and while he goes about his business, sleeping and rising, the seed sprouts and grows even though he knows not how until harvest time comes.

It would be a silly sort of farmer indeed who would plant the seed in the afternoon and then toss and turn all night with anxiousness as to whether or not anything is happening. Then getting up at the crack of dawn run into field with a hoe in hand, peeling away the dirt to see if the seed were germinating. No, a good farmer plants the seed and then he waits. Entrusted to the moist soil, warmed by the sun and watered by the rain, a plant finally emerges. First the ear, then the grain and then the ripened grain ready for harvest.

Farmers have something to teach preachers about patience. Preachers are called to plant the seed of God's Word. We're also called into God's Kingdom as workers in His harvest. But between sowing and harvesting, there must be time for germination, growth, and maturity. The Epistle of James speaks of farmers who wait on the early and late rains. Only then will there be a harvest. Farmers wait with patience.

So must pastors learn how to wait with patience on the implanted Word of the Lord. That can be a problem for us. We want to results and we are tempted to restlessness when those results are not forthcoming. Perhaps we accuse the people God has called us to serve, blaming them for their lack of zeal and energy, pointing to their stubbornness or hard-heartedness. We may even complain to the Lord, acting as if His Word had failed and our work as His ambassadors is futile. In our own sinful anxiety, we may be open to the seduction of the evil one who would entice us to substitute our own methods and means to grow the church forsaking the Word which alone has the power to create faith. Today's text calls us to repent of all such impatience.

Patience is a key virtue for those who are in or who aspire to the pastoral office; but it is not a virtue that we can demand or create for ourselves. We are not to be like the man who prayed “Lord, give me patience and give it to me right now!” No, the patience that we have is born of God’s faithful promise for He declares that His Word does not return to Him or void but achieves the purpose for which He sent it. His Word says what it does and does what it says. His Word works hidden and silent like seed tucked away in the dirt to produce faith in those who hear it when and where it pleases Him.

That is our great comfort and consolation as we preach the Word in season and out of season to use the language of the Apostle. God’s Word does its work delivering the benefits of Jesus, the ever-patient Lamb of God who carried our sins in His own body to death on the cross and was raised from the dead as the first-fruits of God’s kingdom. He now lives and His Word carries the power of His resurrection for you and those He calls you to serve.

Reflecting on the dark and perilous days of the Reformation, Martin Luther would remind his friends of this truth saying that while Master Philip, von Amsdorf and I drank our little glass of Wittenberg beer, the Word of God so worked to overthrow the papacy and extend God’s Kingdom. The Word did it all. That is our confidence as well. God grant unto each of us the patience born of faith to receive His Word, to faithfully plant it in our preaching and teaching, and to wait on Him for the harvest that is sure to come. Amen.

Prof. John T. Pless