

Sermon for June 19, 2024 – 4th Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 4:26-29 EHV

Theme: **Be a farmer of God's Word!**

- 1) Sow the seed.
- 2) Let it grow.
- 3) Marvel at the miracle God performs!

²⁶He said, "The kingdom of God is like this: A man scatters seed on the ground, ²⁷and while he sleeps and rises, night and day, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸The ground produces fruit on its own: first the blade, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹When the crop is ready, he swings the sickle without delay, because the harvest has come."

Jesus commanded his Church to "go and gather disciples from all nations."ⁱ But how are we to accomplish that? What kind of programs and advertisements should we use to get the community interested in joining our little congregation?

Hold on a moment! Before we start making plans about how to "market" our message, let us pay close attention to everything Jesus said when giving this command. He told his disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and gather disciples from all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to keep all the instructions I have given you. And surely I am with you always until the end of the age."ⁱⁱ

In other words, Jesus wants us to teach His Word lovingly to those he puts in our lives and baptize those who desire it for their children and themselves. Everything else is in His hands.

Many believe that Martin Luther had the most profound impact on the Christian Church since apostolic times. When discussing what he did to effect such change, he said: *I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philips and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it.... I did nothing; I let the Word do its work.*ⁱⁱⁱ

If God literally changed the world through Luther's simple preaching and teaching of the Bible, what should our outreach strategy be at Divine Word? What tools and programs should we be using to carry out our Saviour's Great Commission? Simply put: the Gospel itself!

Now, don't get me wrong: I am not saying that planning things like a nativity-themed float for the Christmas parade or having a community corn boil in the summer is pointless. It's not – such things allow us to interact with our community and give us opportunities to share the message of God's love. But what I am saying is this: we shouldn't overthink our confession of Christ to our family, friends and neighbours when it comes to sharing the Gospel with them. Jesus wants us simply to speak the truth in love.

Let us consider that truth this morning, under the theme: **Be a farmer of God's Word!** 1) Sow the seed. 2) Let it grow. 3) Marvel at the miracle God performs!

Part One: Sow the seed.

Our sermon text begins with Jesus saying: *"The kingdom of God is like this..."* "What is the kingdom of God?" you might ask. It is the Holy Christian Church: the grand sum of believers in heaven and on earth. And how does this Church grow? Jesus tells us: like a man scattering *seed on the ground*.

It does not matter how much time and effort a farmer spends preparing his field by plowing and picking out stones, if the farmer does not plant his seeds, there will be no crop!

What I am saying is obvious, right? Then let us also apply it to growing God's Church: the most important thing a Christian can do is sow God's Word - share the Gospel with others. It does not matter how many programs a church offers or how well it connects with the community; if members do not tell people about Jesus, God's Church will not grow.

So, what does this mean for us at Divine Word? That our #1 priority should be sharing the Gospel. "But how?" you might be thinking. "I'm scared to talk about Jesus with other people. They might ask me questions to which I do not know the answers. I might say the wrong thing and offend them."

Let us address some of those fears by going back to the illustration of a farmer. How difficult is it to sow seed? I am not asking about tilling, weeding, or anything else, but just sowing seed on the ground. It is not very difficult at all: you take seed and spread it around on the ground. Sowing is simple.

The same is true regarding sowing the Gospel: all you do is take what God has given you in His Word and tell it to another person. Evangelism is often as easy as saying: "Jesus died and rose again to pay for your sins. Repent and believe in Him, and you will have everlasting life."

Now someone might protest and say that sharing the Gospel is not that simple – that most of the time it seems like our witness has no effect. In response, let me say this: I have never seen someone come to faith after telling them about Jesus just once. Sometimes my witnessing is met with curiosity, other times with joy, and a few times with hostility. Most of the time, however, my witness is met with indifference. Does that mean confessing Christ to others is pointless? No. Why not? Well, let me ask you this: have you ever planted a seed and seen it sprout up immediately in front of you? Of course not! Seeds need time to germinate and grow. The same is true with God's Word. After we sow the seed of the Gospel, we need to let it grow.

Part Two: Let the seed grow.

Jesus continued his parable about the sower: ²⁷*And while he sleeps and rises, night and day, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.*

Seeds are miracles of nature. A kernel of wheat is small, hard, and seemingly dead. But when that wheat kernel is planted, its life springs forth. Yes, God put life in every seemingly lifeless seed, waiting for the proper time and conditions to spring forth.

What is true regarding seed is also true of the Gospel. From a worldly perspective, the Bible seems as fictional and lifeless as the rest of human literature. But that's not the reality. Like a seed, the Gospel *is living and active,*^{iv} ready to sprout into faith and everlasting life after taking root in a person's heart. How so? Because God has attached His all-powerful Spirit to it.

Farmers often spend a lot of money on seed - trusting that the seed will deliver what it was created to produce. Outside forces can hinder a seed's growth, but the farmer will still sow his crop even when the weather is bad. Why? Because he knows that seeds will surprise you.

So also, we, who have been given the seed of the Gospel, need to have faith in the power God placed in the Gospel. The LORD says: *Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return there unless they first water the earth, make it give birth, and cause it to sprout, so that it gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater, in the same way my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty. Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it.*^v

Brothers and sisters in Christ: sow the seed of God's Word. Show people from His law the danger of hell we all are in because of sin. Then tell them the good news that Jesus paid for their sins, conquered death, and offers everlasting life to all who believe in Him. After doing this, trust that the Holy Spirit will do his work through the Gospel seed you sowed.

There are two common mistakes novice gardeners often make after they plant seed. One is being impatient: feeling that it is up to them to get the plants to grow. But if you over-fertilize or over-water your garden, you may hinder or stunt your plants' growth. The same is true regarding the Gospel. If we do not trust the Gospel and try to force or manipulate faith, we might hinder the Gospel's work.

The other mistake novice gardeners might make is being lazy – not doing any fertilizing, weeding, or watering at all. While such a person's garden may still yield a crop, it will probably be meagre. The same is true with the Gospel. Even though God's Word alone has the power to create and strengthen faith, do not let this excuse laziness. Martin Luther, whom I quoted earlier in the sermon as letting the Word do all the work, was not a lazy person. On top of all the work he did reforming the Church, he was a professor, a visiting pastor, a counsellor, and had a family. He wrote extensively and preached often. Luther worked very hard with the Gospel, but he also knew not to interfere with it. He let the Gospel do its work.

Even though the Gospel alone converts a person, we will never finish our work of sharing it. Why? Because just as birds often snatch up freshly sown seed before it has a chance to germinate, so the devil often takes the Gospel away from a person's heart before it takes root. Therefore, we should

not imagine that “once is enough” when it comes to sharing the Gospel with someone. The devil may have snatched God’s Word from their heart before it had a chance to germinate. If the opportunity arises, share Christ again. I remember a friend telling me that you cannot dump too much grass seed when trying to grow a lawn. The same holds true for proclaiming the Gospel — you cannot share it too much!

But once the seed is sown, don’t try to help it along by constantly touching it. Do not think that you can hurry faith’s growth by other things you say and do. The Gospel will sprout in its own time, as our text says: *The ground produces fruit on its own: first the blade, then the head, then the full grain in the head.* ²⁹*When the crop is ready, he swings the sickle without delay, because the harvest has come.*”

Part Three: Marvel at the miracle God performs!

Here in Ontario, we see the miracle of seeds growing lush crops year after year. Fields, once dead and covered with windblown snow, are now green and alive! Small grains planted in the spring have germinated and are starting to produce fruitful plants.

What a miracle each seed is, and yet how easy it is for us to take them for granted! A Christian farmer does not do that. He realizes that, even though he worked hard in the field, the LORD was the one who put life in his seeds. He gave sun, rain, and soil to nourish the seedlings – causing them to grow into mature plants, ready for the harvest.

So, too, we ought to marvel at the seed of God’s Word. Each one of you here is a miracle child of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel! Divine Word’s faithful pastors had great joy in seeing the Gospel awaken faith in your hearts. You can have the same pleasure, too, as you share the Gospel in love with your family, friends, and neighbours.

So, brothers and sisters in Christ, here is God’s great evangelism strategy for you: Be a farmer of the Word. Sow the seed of the Gospel – having full confidence in its life-producing power. Let the seed grow – understanding that human tricks and gimmicks do more to hinder than help faith grow. Then, marvel at the miracle God performs as His Word produces a harvest of souls for His kingdom. Yes, if we remain faithful in sowing the seed of God’s pure Gospel, we can be sure that, at the end of time, we will rejoice in seeing the LORD’s bountiful harvest. Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 28:19

ⁱⁱ Matthew 28:18b-20 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ Luther’s Works AE 51, p.77-78

^{iv} Hebrews 4:12 EHV

^v Isaiah 55:10-11 EHV