



**Liturgical Day:** The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**Date:** June 14, 2009

**Sermon Title:** Sowing Seeds of Faith

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Those of you who pay attention to the church year are aware that we are at the beginning of the longest season in the church calendar. This is called by some "The Sundays after Pentecost." Others call it "Ordinary Time." Others mistakenly call it the season of Pentecost. There may be a number of ways to describe this time of year, and the name of the season may seem a little vague – may seem a little understated. But it is an important time of the year.

We concentrate on the life of Jesus during the first half of the year. We start with Advent – a time of preparing for his arrival. We move into Christmas – a time of celebrating his birth among us. Epiphany follows, when we focus on the ways that God is revealed to us. The next season, Lent, is both a time of becoming more mindful of our own sinfulness and a time of preparing for what comes next. Which is, of course, Holy Week and the season of Easter, when we commemorate Jesus' passion and celebrate his resurrection. The first half of the church year walks from birth to death to new life with our Savior.

The second half of the year, which began just a week ago, and which will continue through November 22<sup>nd</sup> this year, is the time when we ask what the life of Jesus has to do with us. If he is, indeed, the crucified, risen and ascended Lord, then what does that mean for us? How does it call us into faithfulness? How does it empower our living? How does it inform us as to what the cruciform life looks like? These are all questions for the Season after Pentecost. It's why we call this season the season of growth.

I was taught as a young person that there is no such thing as maintaining your faith. No Christian is able to stay in one stage of development. At any given time, we are either growing stronger in faith or growing weaker in faith. Christians are not content to stay as we are, and so this season is one that encourages us to explore what it means to be growing stronger in faith, day-by-day, month-by-month, year-by-year. The church year encourages us in that direction. We have taken six full months to consider the amazing grace of God that we know in Jesus Christ. If we've paid any attention at all; if we have experienced what it means to be loved so fully by God; then we will respond with an equal passion for growing deeper into God's grace, and growing stronger in our own faithfulness.

That is what this season is all about. And so we begin the season by considering two parables from Jesus: two parables about growth. They come in a series of parables directed towards farmers; directed towards people who are familiar with planting and growing and harvesting. We have the man with full barns, the plentiful harvest, the sower, and then today's parables: the seed growing secretly and the mustard seed. This makes sense, of course, if you remember that many of Jesus' travels were in rural areas, where most of his listeners were intimately familiar with planting and tending and harvesting and selling crops.

However, even though he talks about farming quite a bit, you could accuse Jesus of not knowing much about it: his advice in this morning's parable makes little sense. He compares the Kingdom of God with a person who scatters seed on the ground, and then just goes about life. The soil isn't tilled. The weeds aren't pulled. The crops aren't watered. Pests and predators aren't chased off. This particular sower seems to do

nothing more than sleeping and rising, day after day. Yet despite the farmer's inattention, the seeds grow. "The earth produces of itself" Jesus says;

FIRST LESSON

**EZEKIEL 17:22-24**

PSALM

**PSALM 92:1-4, 12-15**

SECOND LESSON

**2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-17**

GOSPEL LESSON

**ST. MARK 4:26-34**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O GOD, YOU ARE THE TREE OF LIFE, OFFERING SHELTER TO ALL THE WORLD. GRAFT US INTO YOURSELF AND NURTURE OUR GROWTH, THAT WE MAY BEAR YOUR TRUTH AND LOVE TO THOSE IN NEED, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR AND LORD. AMEN.

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God's work. Our hands.

“first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain.” Then, when the harvest is ready, one day the farmer wakes up and actually goes out into the field to gather the crops. That isn’t exactly a page out of the *Future Farmers of America* handbook.

This parable runs exactly counter to the good business sense of most modern, successful farmers. Nobody today would fire up the John Deere and pull the broadcaster around the fields throwing seed randomly, and then forget about it for three months until the harvest is ready. These days farmers employ a vast array of technology as they choose the seed, prepare the soil, plant the seed, maintain the field, and bring in the harvest. To be a successful farmer, one needs the mind of a scientist, the heart of a poet and the endurance of a professional athlete.

What is Jesus up to with this story? He certainly is not giving us agricultural advice. No, Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit in this text, and what he is saying is this: you don’t need to have graduate degree in theology in order to share your faith. You simply need to know the story of how God has touched your life, be committed to sharing it with others, and be willing to wait and see what the Holy Spirit can do with what you offer. It’s that third component that is the key to sharing our faith. We need to realize that just as the seed works its way into the ground, and grows all by itself, so too our words of witness can work their way into the heart of another person, and they grow all by themselves, producing the harvest of faith. So what is it that makes those seeds of faith grow? It isn’t us. It is no less than the Holy Spirit.

As Christians, faithful to the call of our Lord, we sow the seed, and we trust the Spirit. The first parable teaches us that we don’t presume to know how it works. We just trust the promise that it will. The second parable teaches us that we don’t worry about whether someone else has more to offer that we might. We just trust that the promise we have from God is enough, and that God can make great things happen out of very modest beginnings.

That is true in our homes. Research shows that the home is the most effective place to plant seeds of faith. When we’re wrestling the terrible twos, or teenagers who are growing independent of us, there are times when it is hard to see that we’re having much of an effect. But the truth is: our children both want and need us to be sharing faith with them, and encouraging them in their life with Christ. As we do so, we plant seeds of faith. Some seeds will grow immediately; others will germinate for years before becoming apparent. But this morning we are assured that we don’t need to worry about how it will happen. We simply are called to share our faith, and trust in God’s promise.

That is true here at church. There are many aspects to a congregation’s ministry, represented here at Saint Peter by the many ministry teams and task forces that make things happen from month to month. But at the heart of everything we do is the desire to share faith with one another. Whether we are worshipping together, or participating in Vacation Bible School, or traveling to Montana to serve a neighbor, or simply enjoying one another’s company, we trust that through our efforts, seeds of faith will be planted, and God will work to deepen our faith and strengthen our commitment to the Gospel. This is the hope which lies at the every heart of our congregation.

That is true in the community as well. I’ve often said that a congregation has no future until it discovers a purpose outside of itself. The same is true of us as individual Christians. Our strongest future begins to become a reality when we discover that we have been blessed to be a blessing. When we seek to be a blessing to others, God uses those gestures of love and kindness to sow seeds of faith in other people’s lives.

Jesus teaches us what happens when seeds of faith are sown. You and I, of course, are the sowers. We are called to sow seeds at home, at church, and in the community. We don’t always understand how the Spirit will use our witness, but we know and trust that God will take what we are able to do, and use it to help others come to faith. And it isn’t depended on the size of our effort. It depends, instead, on the power of God’s presence in our lives.

So join me, if you will, in considering those ways that you can be involved in sowing seeds of faith. Shower your children with love and grace. Find a way or two to join your efforts to ours here at Saint Peter.

Make a difference in the life of a neighbor. In these simple, unassuming ways, we become the vehicles through which God moves, and makes a difference. This is our calling. Let us be faithful. Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (June 14, 2009)

Gospel Lesson; English Text: <sup>i</sup>

<sup>4:26</sup> [Jesus] also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, <sup>27</sup> and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. <sup>28</sup> The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. <sup>29</sup> But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

<sup>30</sup> He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? <sup>31</sup> It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; <sup>32</sup> yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

<sup>33</sup> With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; <sup>34</sup> he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples. <sup>ii</sup>

Gospel Lesson; Greek Text:

<sup>4:26</sup> Καὶ ἔλεγεν· οὕτως ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς ἄνθρωπος βάλη τὸν σπόρον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς <sup>27</sup> καὶ καθεύδη καὶ ἐγείρηται νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν, καὶ ὁ σπόρος βλαστᾷ καὶ μηκύνηται ὡς οὐκ οἶδεν αὐτός. <sup>28</sup> αὐτομάτη ἡ γῆ καρποφορεῖ, πρῶτον χόρτον εἶτα στάχυν εἶτα πλήρης σίτον ἐν τῷ στάχυϊ. <sup>29</sup> ὅταν δὲ παραδοῖ ὁ καρπός, εὐθὺς ἀποστέλλει τὸ δρέπανον, ὅτι παρέστηκεν ὁ θερισμός.

<sup>30</sup> Καὶ ἔλεγεν· πῶς ὁμοιώσωμεν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ ἐν τίνι αὐτὴν παραβολῇ θῶμεν; <sup>31</sup> ὡς κόκκῳ σινάπεως, ὃς ὅταν σπαρῇ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, μικρότερον ὂν πάντων τῶν σπερμάτων τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, <sup>32</sup> καὶ ὅταν σπαρῇ, ἀναβαίνει καὶ γίνεται μείζον πάντων τῶν λαχάνων καὶ ποιεῖ κλάδους μεγάλους, ὥστε δύνασθαι ὑπὸ τὴν σκιὰν αὐτοῦ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατασκηνοῦν.

<sup>33</sup> Καὶ τοιαύταις παραβολαῖς πολλαῖς ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς τὸν λόγον καθὼς ἠδύναντο ἀκούειν. <sup>34</sup> χωρὶς δὲ παραβολῆς οὐκ ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς, κατὰ ἰδίαν δὲ τοῖς ἰδίοις μαθηταῖς ἐπέλυεν πάντα. <sup>iii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>.

<sup>ii</sup> St. Mark 4:26-34, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

<sup>iii</sup> St. Mark 4:26-34, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).