

Epworth Chapel on the Green
June 17, 2018
Pentecost 4
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Ezekiel 31:1-14
Psalm 92
2 Corinthians 5:1-10
Mark 4:26-34

Our Gospel lesson today is a combination of two brief parables, one dealing with the sowing of seed and the mysterious growth process of nature, and the other dealing with the mustard seed. While they are paired together, I'm going to focus on the first of the two parables this morning.

Jesus likens the Kingdom of God to a farmer who plants seeds in his field. He then goes about other activities, and as the days and weeks go by, the seeds sprout and grow without the farmer's help, because (as Jesus says), "the earth produces crops on its own" (v. 28). There is a process involved, a process which takes time. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens. The process takes time, and it is largely out of the farmer's control.

Now why would Jesus tell his disciples this parable? What need did they have in their lives which this story might address?

It is quite possible Jesus tells this parable because his disciples are discouraged, and impatient. Why? What reason do they have to be discouraged and impatient?

Well, they've been witnessing Jesus as he teaches and embodies the Kingdom of God. They've seen firsthand Jesus touch people (like a lady who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years) and heal them instantly. They've seen Jesus take a man whose hand was shriveled up and frozen in an arthritic grip, and make it new. They've witnessed some miracles that show to them that Jesus isn't merely *talking* about the Kingdom, Jesus *is* the Kingdom of God brought near.

And this causes the disciples a problem. They are witnessing the inbreaking of God's power in their midst, and when they see what is happening, it prompts them to want God's power and Kingdom to come right NOW, in all its fullness. Getting a small taste of what Jesus is doing causes the disciples to want the whole enchilada.

And it is easy for us to sympathize with the disciples, and more importantly, to empathize with them. We look at our world, and at our personal lives, and we catch occasional glimpses of God's power. But what we'd really like is to see the whole load come all at once.

We look around and see much of the world in poverty and hunger, little children without clean water or medicine. And we catch glimpses where the

church is at work to bring relief, but in our hearts we cry, “God, why don’t you just fix this NOW?”

We see the disparity between rich and poor continue to grow in our world, and we see nations and individuals who are proud and arrogant in their prosperity while others are begging for bread in the streets. We do what we can to help, and we see places where the church is at work to make a difference. But we cry out, “God, when will your justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream?”

We look inward at our own lives. We see our struggles, our failures, our inability to make sense of what God is doing in our lives. Sometimes we feel we lack clear direction. There are occasional moments when we recognize God’s hand at work in our lives. But those just serve to lead us to cry out: “God, can’t you move things along in my life just a little faster, and make things a little clearer?”

This is the sort of thing I think the disciples must have been asking of Jesus. God’s power has come near to them. And now that they’ve seen the tip of the iceberg, they want the whole thing.

And what does Jesus tell them? Look at the farmer planting seeds. The farmer plants the seed, but at that point he becomes part of a process that is beyond his control or manipulation. Nature is working in ways that the farmer cannot see

or discern, and it is important for the farmer to let her mysterious growth process run its course. Things will happen as they should -- in due time.

In the mean time, there is nothing the farmer can do to control the process. The wisest choice the farmer can make is to have faith in this process which is beyond human control, and which transcends human understanding. To trust that the seeds which were planted are growing whether he watches or not, whether he is tending them every moment or not. Those seeds may not look like much in the beginning, but the day will come when the results will astonish him beyond measure.

What might the Spirit of God want to say to us this morning through Jesus' words?

Some of you may be sitting here this morning, and you may be feeling disappointment, or even discouragement. Disappointment at what you perceive to be the ineffectiveness of God's power in the world, or in your life, at this moment. Discouragement because God hasn't lived up to your expectations. Discouragement that God hasn't revealed more of his power to you, when he clearly has it to reveal.

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, I want to ask you a question:
Are you willing to be patient with God, and to trust that God is working in your life in this moment even though you may not see it?

And with that question also comes a challenge and an invitation. As you come to the Table, I invite you to come and to relinquish your attempts to control *how* and *when* God works in your life. Come with simple trust in his grace and wisdom. Come with the assurance that the workings of God's grace are beyond your control and your manipulation. And rest in the fact that God is bringing his will to pass in your life, all in his good time.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”