

**Mark 4:26-32**

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

**<sup>30</sup> Then he said, “To what should we compare the kingdom of God? Or with what parable may we picture it? <sup>31</sup> It is like a mustard seed, which when sown on the ground is one of the smallest of all the seeds planted in the ground. <sup>32</sup> Yet when it is planted, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches so that the birds of the sky can nest under its shade.”**

Dear Sowers of God’s saving gospel.

Look at a seed. It can be a corn seed, a tomato seed, a mustard seed, or even a sequoia seed. How does something so small, so shriveled up, so seemingly insignificant grow into bushels of corn or baskets of tomatoes or mustard on our hot dogs or a 250 foot tall monstrosity of a tree? It’s hard to imagine that something so small, so shriveled up, so seemingly insignificant has the power to bring forth a harvest.

The bigger question I have is: Do we look at God’s Word the same way we might look at those seeds? Is there a temptation, especially into today’s society, where more and more people care less what the Bible says, where the harvest field of souls can seem more like a drought-stricken desert than amber waves of grain, (is there a temptation) to look at God’s Word like a small, shriveled up, insignificant seed? Is there a temptation to think God’s Word has lost its impact on people’s lives and its power to produce? Is there a temptation to think that it is an effort of futility to even try to share God’s Word in today’s culture? Is there a temptation to think we’ve become outdated, old-fashioned, and irrelevant because we believe God’s Word is true and timeless? If there is, I get the temptation.

When all the stats show that the Christian church is declining, when political ideology rather than Gospel truth has become the new religion, when the majority of people would much rather put their faith in what is seen than in what is unseen, it’s easy to understand the attitude the prophet Jonah had toward the pagan city of Nineveh and why he ran the other way when the Lord told him to go there and preach the Word. Who today wants to listen? Who today cares?

Well, like Jonah needed an attitude adjustment toward the effectiveness of God’s Word, maybe we need one too. Listen to these two parables Jesus told in Mark 4: Jesus said, **“This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”** Again he said, **“What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.”** (26-32)

The kingdom of God, the active power of God’s grace, the Word itself is what converts hearts,

creates faith, and makes disciples. Do any of us know exactly how it does this? No, it's a profound miracle of grace. But just like the farmer doesn't know how the seed that he plants sprouts and grows, neither do we need to know. We just need to know that when God's Word is planted, it works, it grows, it changes hearts, it produces fruit. The Word's power is undeniable, and its potential is limitless. Just look at your own faith. Just look at everyone gathered here today. All of you are proof that:

### **Sermon Theme: God's Word Works!**

- 1. It worked in our hearts**
- 2. It works in the hearts of those to whom we share it**

It works because of the message it conveys. First, it conveys a message that pierces the heart. It's a message where God says, 'I know you. No, not the person you'd like other people to think you are. I know you. I know your worst thoughts, your darkest secrets. I know the way you lust, the way you envy, the way you hate. I know every sin you've ever committed. And I'm not good with any of it.' You know how true these words are. Your conscience bears witness to the fact.

But there's another part of the message that cleanses the conscience. It's a message where God says, 'I know you, and I love you anyway. I know how you have failed me, so I sent my Son to make up for every one of your failings. I know the kind of person you've been, and so I had my Son suffer for it. I know the punishment you deserve, and so I had my Son crucified for it. No, I am not good with your sin, but I am satisfied with the sacrifice that my Son made for your sin on the cross. You are forgiven.' And by the Spirit's power, this is the message that takes root in hearts, sprouts, grows, and flourishes so that here you are today. Yes, God's Word has that kind of power. Think of where you once were and where you are now. Think of what you once were like and who you are now. You were dead in sin and now are alive in Christ. You were objects of God's wrath and now are his chosen children. God's Word works! Jesus wants to impress this upon you in these parables of Mark because he knows how easy it is to think the Word has lost its power today. News flash: It hasn't!

Nor has God's Word lost its potential. This church is a clear illustration of Jesus' parable of the mustard seed. A couple of families started this church in 1864. Today, 157 years later as we look around we see over 770 members who call St. John their spiritual home. That's a miracle! That is God's Word working in the hearts of the people in this area. But the potential of God's Word isn't really about the numbers. It's about planting the seed, letting God do his work, and reaping his harvest. It's not just about bushels and bushels of people, although that can happen and has happened. Three thousand people converted from one sermon Peter preached in Acts 2. But it's really about reaching that one soul at a time with the message of Jesus.

The question is: How do you view that potential? There are plenty of stories in Scripture to view it only one way: God's Word works. Take the city of Nineveh where Jonah eventually preached. The Bible says that whole city (approximately 120,000 people) repented and believed God. Take the Samaritan woman, who had had five husbands and was living in sin. The Bible says in John 4 that she and her people believed that Jesus was the Savior of the world. Take the apostle Paul who once viciously persecuted Christians. Listen to his own words: **"He did this even though formerly I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man. But I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief."** (1 Timothy 1:13).

Because the potential of God's Word yesterday is no less powerful today, we need to keep planting the seed to the people around us so that the Holy Spirit can continue to work in the hearts of people. Who knows how many people can and will be affected as we share the small seed of God's saving Gospel with the people we know. And don't be discouraged if people reject your message or don't seem to listen or be interested. Think of this way. If we reach just one person or one family, say out of a thousand, it's worth it, because it's about that one that finds a safe haven in God's promises and perches in the soothing shade the good news of Jesus Christ gives. And then who knows the fruits that can come from that one person or family. Why should we doubt it would be anything less than the harvest the farmer experienced in Mark 4?

But may I state the obvious: For this potential to be reached, the seed needs to be planted. God's Word is not only what we hold in our heart but it's also what we hold in our hands – to scatter, to plant, to share. But the reason to plant the seed of God's Word is not just the practicality that you have to plant seed for something to grow. The real reason to plant the seed of God's Word is because God thought the world was worth dying for on a cross and salvation is found in no one else. The real reason to plant the seed of God's Word is the change the message of salvation can affect in the hearts, lives, and destinies of people. The real reason to plant the seed of God's Word is the heavenly rejoicing when one person comes to faith in Christ. The real reason to plant the seed of God's Word is because you know what it has done for you. You know God's Word works. So trust it and share it.

And how can we plant this seed. We can personally share God's Word with the people in our lives. We call this Friendship Evangelism. Sharing God's Word with your friends and family circle. Starting next Sunday, we will be having a 4-5 week Bible Class on Sunday mornings to help encourage all of us to share God's Word with our friends and family. We can financially support the sending of missionaries to our Home and World Missions – like Pastor Bostedt who was here yesterday from the Apache Mission field. We can do this through our regular Mission offerings to Church or you can send offerings personally to places around the world. God also tells us to pray for those who are lost that the message of Jesus might be shared with them and that they may believe. Pray for that friend or family member who needs to hear God's Word. Pray for our missionaries and their families that they may have the strength and perseverance to share God's Word in places we can never go personally.

We do all this because trust that God's Word does work and that it will change people's hearts just like it changed our hearts. I pray that we see that God has given us the greatest work in all the world to plant his seed trusting that that the harvest will be great. Amen.