

Mark 4:26-34 – Scatter the Seed

For the last few hundred years, even non-revival churches have been captive to a revivalist understanding of evangelism. We have been forever changed by the image of people knocking on your door trying to convince you of their religious truth and of people deciding to follow Jesus after hearing an emotional appeal. Add to that the false idea that truth does not matter as much as sincerity and that none of us really can know the truth about God. So we cling to our own ideas and try to convince the uncommitted that our truth is the better truth – so evangelism becomes who is better at explaining or selling their version of the truth.

In addition, the whole focus of evangelization has become so individual that faith is reduced to a mere decision, feeling, or desire instead of trust in the objective Truth who is Christ. So evangelism becomes more about establishing a relationship than doctrine, the Gospel a product to be sold, and the churches arguing over where you should go to get their product. So where is the voice of the Word calling into the darkened wilderness of the world with forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ Jesus?

Today we heard Jesus describe how the Kingdom of God comes. It is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. Funny how Jesus distances the work of the man from the seed and its growth. The man does not plot out the field or judge the soil or otherwise tinker with the scattering of the seed. He just scatters the seed. Period. The seed is the Word of God. It does not belong to us and we do not control it or manipulate it. God makes it work. The farmer sleeps and rises while the seed sprouts and grows as God bids it.

I grew up when farming was a small operation and the farmer was dependent upon weather, soil, and timing. Now it is a big business where the soil is manipulated, manipulated seeds are planted, the plants fertilized and herbicides keep the bugs away. Irrigation makes up for the unpredictability of rain. I wonder if the same thing has not happened to the Church. Our marketing savvy, our technology, and our confidence in our craft have taught us to trust in and seek to control what is and has always been the domain of God. All we are called to do is scatter the seed.

What does it mean to scatter the seed? It means to speak the Gospel in words. It means to act out the Gospel in deeds. Is that really so difficult? It is not our faith we are called to share but the Word of the Lord. We are not here to replicate our faith in others but to speak the Word that has the power to bring forth fruit. We act out the Gospel because the Word is not intellectually appealing but the power of love at work, redeeming and transforming lost lives and making holy what is sinful and dirty. The Gospel is the power of mercy and service like we learn from the Good Samaritan. But this mercy and service is nothing more and nothing less than Christ at work in us and through us. The love of Christ compels us to act in love and show forth the Kingdom of God.

We scatter the seed of the Gospel in words, deeds, and actions. The rest is God's domain. We sleep and rise and sleep again. But God continues to work His will. The Word brings forth His appointed fruit – not because we help it along but because God wills it.

The earth produces by itself, first the blade and then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear. The blade is the fragile new growth of faith. It is new and wonderful but weak and vulnerable. Because we know the power of God in Word and Sacrament, we bring the new Christian into the Church where he is protected from the assaults of the enemy, from the voice of doubt in the world, and from the temptation to sin within every Christian. As the Lutheran Hour used to say: bringing Christ to the nations and the nations to the Church. It is all about God's power and grace working in the Means of Grace to make this new growth prosper and bear its appointed fruit.

The ear appears with all its potential. The future lies right there in the life reborn by the work of God in baptism. We have all that we need to do what God bids and become what God has called us to be. We have the Word. We have the Sacraments. By these means of grace the Spirit works to bring forth the fruit God has appointed. We do not make the fruit appear; the Lord brings forth His appointed fruit in us and faith trusts and rejoices in God's work.

Then the full grain shall appear. The farmer does more waiting than anything else. Waiting for the new growth, for the grain to appear, and then for it to ripen for the harvest. The harvest is not our moment but God's. The harvest is plentiful by God's design. The day for that harvest God will appoint and we do not get to choose that day nor can we anticipate it. Once the disciples wanted to weed out God's field but Jesus insists that all must be left until God's appointed hour. It is enough for us to recognize the work of God all around us, to rejoice in the richness and fullness of what God has done, and to be ready when He calls for the harvest.

Evangelism is not a methodology or a program. It is putting into practice the trust that God does what He promises and we are to do what He bids. Scatter the seed. Worry not where it falls or upon whose ears the Word is spoken or among whom the mercy of Christ is shown. Just do it. God will do the rest. If we do the small part God has equipped us to do, God will do the rest. But if we disdain scattering the seed, we only betray our failure to trust and our unwillingness to act for the Kingdom that called us through the voice of the Word and claimed us in baptismal water.

It is not that we lack the training or programs or marketing ability or technology that the Church is in crisis. It is that we lack confidence in God, in His Word, and in His Spirit. It is this that cripples the individual Christian and creates the doubt and fear that keeps us silent when we are called to speak, that searches for words when God's Word is to be proclaimed, and that substitutes talk about us for the Word of the cross and empty tomb.

If you do what God asks, God will do the rest. You need not understand it or agree with it. God will do what He has promised. Salvation does not come by human will or decision and neither does the Church grow by these means. Salvation comes by the Word proclaimed and heard by the Spirit and the Church's job, our job as baptized believers, is to scatter the seed of the Word in words, in actions, and in demonstration of the Kingdom's values. God will do the rest. And, miracle of miracles, your faith grows as well.