

Mark 4:26-34

Have you ever planted a seed in a paper cup? Scientists can explain all about the germination process, however, those of us who are not botanists, there's a bit of mystery, isn't there? We put some dirt in a cup, place a seed in it, and cover it with more dirt. Give it some water. Wait a few days, and a shoot is pushing through the dirt. Much like the farmer Jesus was talking about in today's reading. I'm pretty sure Jesus is talking about wheat, because of the grain, and we know there were wheat plants growing in the Middle East at that time. As soon as the grain was ripe the farmer would go into the field with his sickle and gather the grain because the harvest had arrived.

I had a congregation member who was called the Corn King because he harvested so much high quality corn. He had a huge machine that scattered the seeds. Before long, the stalk would push through. Then the ears of corn would appear on the stalk. Then the silk becomes dark all the way down to the ear, and the ear of corn leans away from the stalk. That's when it's time to harvest the corn. Golden Bantam, a variety of corn, is said to have come from one stalk found on a hillside in Vermont. No one knows how the stalk got there. Fortunately, the man who found it realized the quality and replanted it year after year, and now it is available all over. That's how the kingdom of God works.

The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground. The seed would sprout and grow. There was nothing the farmer had to do in the parable but scatter the seed. There's nothing more we have to do to grow the kingdom except scatter the seed. Well, we don't have little seed packets to open up and shake out, so how do we scatter the seeds?

By letting people know we follow Jesus. By having a sticky story about our faith-life that draws people in, gets them excited, and wants them to know more. So, we don't have a sticky story? What is a sticky story?

The really good sticky stories are about persons who grew up not knowing Jesus and found him somewhere along the path of their life. The sticky part is that it is interesting to hear people's conversion stories. So, I Googled, "how I met Jesus" and found a YouTube video by "Joseph the Dreamer". He's an English man, probably in his 40's. He grew up in a Christian home, struggled at school. In his teens, as a lot of us do, he left the church behind. All he was interested in was dancing. So he trained. Then he found film-making and went to college. The first semester was so hard he didn't think he'd go back, but on break he started watching Christian YouTube videos. One of the preachers on a video inspired him. Joseph prayed, "All I want to do is serve you and glorify you. Come, Jesus, and make a home in my heart." Joseph went back to school, became head of the Christian student group, and graduated. From there he was a stunt man for Johnny Depp and realized what he really wanted to do was be a director. That's what he is doing now. He said he goes into work on the film with the purpose to glorify God and point people toward Jesus. His words of wisdom are "Jesus has the answer. It is so much simpler than we make it. We don't need to know all the answers right now, but we do need to know that Jesus has the answers."

After I thought about it a while, I realized I have a friend with a really sticky story. His name is Al, I was at his house last weekend for a memorial service for his best friend. In his younger years Al turned to drugs. His cousin told him he had to stop that; he was killing himself, but he was addicted. He was selling drugs out of his work van. Al was eventually caught, arrested and imprisoned for at least 7 years, it may have been more. In prison he found

Jesus. I've met a few men who found Jesus in prison only to lose him once again after they've been released. But not Al. Al grew in his relationship with Christ. He is very active in a Christian men's fellowship group; he talks about Jesus' impact on his life... he is even going so far as to have his Corvette painted in a way that will draw people to it so he can share the gospel.

Now, that's a sticky story. And maybe you have a sticky story too... If you do you can start practicing it and then share it with people. And if you don't, you still can live your life with the purpose of glorifying God and point people toward Jesus.

Jesus goes on to talk about the mustard seed... one of the smallest of seeds on the earth. How many of you remember those necklaces girls used to wear, a clear glass bead with a mustard seed in the center? It could have been used as a talking point to get people to ask about the necklace, a chance to share about Jesus and the kingdom of God.

That tiny little seed puts down deep roots. Then it grows into a bush. In our clergy pericope group this week some of the pastors said that it was outlawed in their states because it is considered an invasive species... one that spreads and takes over. That sounds like something Jesus was trying to describe, something that spreads and takes over... only in a good way.

Jesus is giving the mustard bush or shrub the starring role in the parable of the kingdom of heaven. He says that it puts forth branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.

Now let's look at the big picture here... we have a farmer who plants seeds that mysteriously produce a crop. We introduce an invasive weed, one that not only spreads over the land, but also invites the birds to make their nests. From what I can tell, farmers don't care much for birds... some of them even put scarecrows in their fields to keep the birds from eating the seeds or the crop. What is Jesus trying to tell us here?

If we have faith the size of a mustard seed we have more than what we need. A mustard seed will grow to great proportions and become a sheltering bush. The mustard seed needs no special treatment. Get it started and it will flourish. God's word can stand on its own. Speak the word and it will flourish. It will spread and grow and welcome all persons. It will be a place of protection.

Such a small seed, seemingly insignificant. But the Bible is full of the power of small and insignificant. A small town was the birthplace of Jesus. Mary was a young girl, not chosen because she was a notable person. The disciples were insignificant men whom Jesus gathered together. You'd think, with such an insignificant start, the gospel would have been lost in the confusion. Yet, like the Golden Bantam corn, it has been saved and sown, and can be found all around the world. The news of the kingdom of God has spread from that small insignificant beginning. Like the mustard bush it has spread and grown, welcoming one and all. We can spread the seed. God does the rest of the work.

All glory be to God. Amen.