

Sermon Proper 6 2018

June 17th, 2018

Mark 4:26-34

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read. Especially these words: **“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade**

You have maybe noticed that I’m not usually one to make a big hullabaloo regarding secular holidays in my sermons. When we are gathered here as the Lord’s people, yes we are still citizens of the United States in 2018, but there’s an aspect where we need leave the world at the door, and enter the Lord’s house strictly with our Heavenly citizenship in mind. That being said, today I want to start with something relating to Father’s Day.

If you saw the most recent Lutheran Witness you saw that it was about fatherhood. Actually more specifically, it was about “Men at Church.” It was about the trends that we see in our culture in relation to higher proportions of women connected with the Church than men. In fact it not only pointed to statistics which show that women are significantly more likely to be connected to the Church than men, it also pointed out how other statistics relating to men are affected as well. For example, the life expectancy of men is decreasing. Men are much more likely to die from causes related to drugs, alcohol, or self-harm than women. Men are 96.2% of the shooters in active shooter situations.

So we should ask ourselves, why is this happening? Why is this a problem? Well, the magazine made the point as to how so many fathers are not fulfilling their primary role. Quoting Luther, one of the authors said that fathers are *“first to bring up their children in the fear and knowledge of God, **and then**, if they are so gifted also to have them engage in formal study and learn so that they may be of service wherever they are needed.”* So according to Luther, the first and most important thing for fathers to do is to teach their children the faith. And as a note, I would say Scripture agrees because Paul tells fathers, **“Do not provoke your children to anger,**

but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” That’s the first and most important thing. Earthly education is important, but secondary to that. Is this how fathers think, though? Unfortunately, in my generation and younger many fathers are still teenagers more concerned about how to make sure they have time to access the leisure activities they want to access than they have been concerned about things like marrying their children’s mother and providing the stability of that home, let alone providing long term for the child. In other words, there are a lot of fathers now who don’t even get the secondary portion let alone the first. Sadly, though, even for those who do understand the need to provide – and there are many—a high number of them are more concerned with making sure their children get into a top school system than that they take the time to pray with their children and teach them the Scriptures and catechism. Why? Because the goal is to get ahead in the world.

Now as a note, fathers if you feel accused by this, know I do too. Know that I know there is always more we could be doing to teach children faithfully, which is yet another reminder of our only hope being the cross of Christ. And our dependence on that is the greatest lesson we can teach our children.

But what is the issue really at the heart of all of this? What does all of this really reflect? Well it reflects something that isn’t unique to fathers. I mentioned fathers not only because it’s Fathers’ Day, but also because there are so many statistics that demonstrate how important faithful fathers are to children remaining in the faith. Even beyond this, the reality is, this problem we see manifested in fathers is something that is true for all of us. What’s that? We think the Kingdom of God is too little. Like Jesus said, the kingdom of God is **“like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth.”** The problem is that we think that since we can’t see the greatness of the Kingdom of God, the things we can see are more important. We think that because we see things seemingly more pressing, the Kingdom of God isn’t pressing.

And how does this reflect itself? In the priorities we make: not taking time to hear and learn the Lord’s Word. Not taking time to pray. Not taking time to dedicate our efforts to knowing and confessing the faith. Even beyond this in our day we hear it in the things people say, or imply. After all, what good is Jesus’ sacrifice, when all I have to do is “try hard and be sincere to get to heaven?” What

does going to church matter when I have a god who's a fluffy marshmallow love god that never considers anything we do that bad? What does anything about God matter when I see the needs at the end of my nose and they are all consuming?

And let's not assume that as Christians we are any less guilty. How often would we rather come in to church and hear a sermon that entertains me than teaches me? Or one that tells me how to make my life better, even how I can be better if I try harder, than yet another sermon about how Jesus died for me? I can imagine it happens to you, because as a Pastor I am even tempted by the desire to produce something strictly about these things, rather than my usual Law Gospel sermon. But is there really more to the Christian life than Law and Gospel? Is there more than these commands which God has given to me, which He calls me to follow, and I don't? Is there more than the fact that Jesus has kept those commands perfectly because I couldn't? In these two things is the whole of the Christian life. In these two things, we have all we need. Why do we need something else? Why do we need riches to provide our security, when we have the God who promises that if we seek His Kingdom and His righteousness all these things will be provided for me? Why do we need earthly pleasures to satisfy our passions now, when the Lord promises an eternity of pleasure and joy in His presence? Why do we need castles that will fall when we have rooms in an eternal mansion? Why do we need these temporal things, when we have the eternal promise which is far greater, the promise that is given, not because we deserve it, not because we have earned it, but because Jesus has purchased it and given it to us by His grace and His grace alone?

The short answer is we don't. Of course, many earthly things are fine in and of themselves. In and of itself it's not wrong to have a bank account with money in it to provide for my needs and the foreseen needs of my children. It's not wrong to want to try to put funds in place to provide an education for my children. But what's the most important thing? To paraphrase a friend of mine, "I would rather my child grow up and make a meager living as a Christian than have all the wealth he could want and lose his faith." Do the two have to be mutually exclusive? No. But let's not presume that we can serve both God and money.

And our draw to serve earthly things just proves it. To our earthly eyes, the Kingdom of God appears small. It appears like that Mustard Seed. But Christians, it is that Kingdom, that **"when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the**

garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” Christians, this Kingdom of God doesn't look like much, but it is your shelter. It is the cover of the tree so that the sun doesn't strike you by day. It is the cover of the blood of Jesus over your sins. The cover of His blood shed for you on the cross, and won for you in His resurrection. The cover over your unrighteousness with the perfect righteousness in Him.

And how does this come? It is that seed that is cast. It is that seed produced by the earth automatically, by itself. It comes to you by the Word. That Strong Word, comes to you and brings God's Kingdom, it brings Jesus. It brings His blood shed for you covering your sin. It bespeaks you righteous like the hymn says. It seems such a meager word. A word preached by a jar of clay. It seems so lowly as it was copied by broken fallible human being over millennia. It seems so incomplete, not answering so many questions we have. It seems so worthless when it comes to putting food on my table and a roof over my head. But it is that greatest of all plants. It is the greatest of words, "Your sin is forgiven." "I baptize you, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." "This is my body given into death for you."

Yes, as we hear that word, it doesn't seem like much; that seed that's cast. But it is great, doing magnificent things. It's something that we take for granted, but we can see what this is from the existence of the Church on earth. Think about it. The Church started so small, twelve lowly men preaching. And now it covers the nations of the earth. We can't see it growing, we can only trust that what it says is true and it really is the greatest thing. Yes it is the greatest thing, and that is true whether we are fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, or brothers and sisters. Amen.