

The Third Sunday After Pentecost

Mark 4: 26-34

June 14, 2015

My Fellow Redeemed In Christ,

In The Last Twenty-Five Years The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Along With Many Other Denominations, Has Been Influenced By What Is Known As The Church Growth Movement. Now, Who Would Be Against Church Growth? Doesn't Everyone Want The Church To Grow? Didn't Jesus Tell His Church To Make Disciples Of All Nations? Well Of Course. So What's The Problem? Well, The Problem Is In How To Grow The Church. The Church Growth Movement Uses Lots Of Principles That Imply That God Needs Some Help To Grow His Church. One Of The Most Obvious And Popular Techniques Used Is An Entertaining Style Of Worship Service That Targets The Emotions And Is Designed To Make People Feel Good. You Don't Have To Go To Church To Feel Good. Kathy And I Recently Went To A Pop Concert At Benaroya Hall..And We Left Feeling Very Good. I Have Been Studying The Church Growth Movement For Over Twenty-Five Years, And I Am Convinced That One Problem Is A Lack Of Faith In God's Word. Which Brings Me To Our Gospel Reading For This Morning Where Jesus Teaches Us That **"Only God's Word Grows The Church"**

I. That's It. God's Word. That's All We Need To Grow His Church. Indeed, This Is What Jesus Says In The Great Commission: **"Go Therefore And Make Disciples Of All Nations, Baptizing Them In The Name Of The Father And Of The Son And Of The Holy Spirit Teaching Them To Observe All That I Have Commanded You" (Matthew 28: 19, 20, Esv).** **"Teaching"** Jesus Says. Teaching What? God's Word.

A. The Kingdom Of God Is Not Like Other Kingdoms. It's Not About Constitutions And By-Laws, Rites And Ceremonies, Structures And Organizations. It's Not About Methods And Techniques. The Kingdom Of God Is Not A Human Institution And Therefore It's Not Built Like Other Human Institutions. It Is A Spiritual Reality As Jesus Told **Pontius Pilate: "My Kingdom Is Not Of This World" (John 18: 36, Esv).** The Kingdom Of God Is The Rule Of Jesus Christ In The Hearts Of People Who Trust In Him For The Forgiveness Of Their Sins. They Are In His Kingdom Of God's Grace. Only Jesus Christ Establishes The Kingdom Of God. He Did This With His Sinless Life And His Death On The Cross For The Sins Of The World, For Your Sins And Mine. As He Said On The Cross: **"It Is Finished!" (John 19: 30, Esv).** In Jesus Christ Satan's Kingdom Of Sin And Death Has Been Defeated. And Everyone Who Trusts In Jesus Is Transferred From Satan's Kingdom Of Sin And Death To God's Kingdom Life And Salvation As Paul Says In His Letter To The Colossians: **"[God] Has Delivered Us From The Domain Of Darkness And Transferred Us To The Kingdom Of His Beloved Son, In Whom We Have Redemption, The**

**Forgiveness Of Sins" (1: 13, 14, Esv).** Only God's Word Can Do This.....His Word Of Law Which Condemns Sin, Your Sin And Mine.....And Especially His Word Of Gospel Which Forgives Sin, Your Sin And Mine.

B. So Jesus Says, "**The Kingdom Of God Is As If A Man Should Scatter Seed On The Ground" (V. 26, Esv).** A Farmer Doesn't Produce The Crop...The Seed Does Because It, And Not The Farmer, Has The Power To Produce A Plant. . And So It Is With God's Word. God's Word Has The Power To Bring People To Faith In Jesus And To Keep Them In Faith. So The Apostle Peter Says: "**...Since You Have Been Born Again, Not Of Perishable Seed But Of Imperishable, Through The Living And Abiding Word Of God....And This Word Is The Good News That Was Preached To You" (1: 23, 25, Esv).** And The Apostle Paul Says In His Letter To The Romans: "**So Faith Comes From Hearing, And Hearing Through The Word Of Christ") 10: 17, Esv).** And It Is Only By This Same Word Of God That God Continues To Work In Our Lives To Stay In Faith And To Live For Him As Again Paul Says In His First Letter To The Thessalonians: "**And We Also Thank God Constantly For This, That When You Received The Word Of God, Which You Heard From Us, You Accepted It Not As The Word Of Men But As What It Really Is, The Word Of God, Which Is At Work In You Believers" (2: 13, Esv).** "**Which Is At Work In You Believers"**. Here Paul Reminds Us That This Working Of The Seed Of God's Word Cannot Be Seen With The Eyes Because It Is Working Inside Of Us.....In Our Hearts And Minds. Only God Can See Faith In The Heart As Paul Says In His Second Letter To Timothy: "**But God's Firm Foundation Stands, Bearing This Seal: "The Lord Knows Those Who Are His" (2: 19, Esv).** The Kingdom Of God, The Church, Can Never Be Accurately Measured By Human Standards And Measurements.

C. But The Church May Be Seen Wherever People Who Confess Jesus Christ As Savior Gather Around God's Word And Sacraments Which Our Lutheran Confessions Call "**The Marks Of The Church"**\*. Only When Jesus Returns Visibly To Judge The Living And The Dead Will The Kingdom Of God, Those Who Believe In Jesus, Be Visible For All To See.....And It Will Be An Impressive Sight Of So Many People As Jesus Says: "**It Is Like A Grain Of Mustard Seed, Which...Is The Smallest Of All Seeds On Earth, Yet When It Is Sown It Grows Up And Becomes Larger Than All The Garden Plants...." (Vv. 31, 32, Esv).** This Is The "**Harvest**" That Jesus Refers To In Verse 29. And It Will Be An Impressive Sight On That Day. But Until Then The Kingdom Of God Will Remain Hidden Under The Forms Of Organizations, Structures And Activities.

Ii. And Like A Farmer Who Regularly And Faithfully Sows The Seed To Produce His Crop; We Are To Regularly And Faithfully Bring The Kingdom Of God, The Word Of God To As Many People As Possible So That The Kingdom Of God Can Be Created And Grow. But We Must Resist The Church Growth

Movement Thinking That We Have To Help The Word Of God With Our Own Efforts, Techniques And Methods.

A. Jesus Shows Us That A Farmer Who Sows The Seed Doesn't Worry About The Results---He Simply Believes That The Seed Will Produce Crops. The Farmer Went About His Business Trusting That The Seed Would Work, As Jesus Says, **"He Sleeps And Rises Night And Day, And The Seed Sprouts And Grows; He Knows Not How" (V. 27, Esv).** In Our Text, Indeed During His Whole Ministry, That's What Jesus Was Doing...Sowing The Word Of God As We Read, **"He Spoke The Word To Them...." (V. 33, Esv).** And So It Has Been In The Church Ever Since. It's What We Do Here At Messiah. We Preach And Teach The Word In As Many Ways That We Can To As Many People As We Can. \* We Do It On Sunday Morning In The Divine Service And During The Education Hour. \* We Do It During The Week With Another Service And Bible Study. And This Is All Extended Beyond The Walls Of Messiah With Our Live Stream Services And Recorded Audio. \* And We Give Over \$87.000 To Support Missions Where The Word Of God Is Preached And Taught:

Concordia Lutheran School;

Two Students At The Fort Wayne Seminary;

The Russian Seminary Project;

Mekane Yesus; Ethiopian Lutheran Church; And Our Mission In Moscow, Idaho.

Missionaries In The Dominican Republic, Papua New Guinea; And Sri Lanka;

Issues, Etc. Radio Program;

Lutheran Ministry Services Northwest;

As Well As The Northwest District Of The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod And The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. And This Doesn't Count What We All Do As Individuals And Families.

B. And As We Do These Things, Sowing The Seed Of God's Word.. We Simply Trust, Like A Farmer Trusting The Seed, That God Will Take Care Of The Results As Jesus Says In John's Gospel: **"That Which Is Born Of The Flesh Is Flesh, And That Which Is Born Of The Spirit Is Spirit. Do Not Marvel That I Said To You, 'You Must Be Born Again.' The Wind Blows Where It Wishes, And You Hear Its Sound, But You Do Not Know Where It Comes From Or Where It Goes. So It Is With Everyone Who Is Born Of The Spirit"** (Vv. 6-8, Esv). Our Lutheran Confessions Had This Passage In Mind In The Augsburg Confession: "Through The Word And Sacraments, As Through Instruments, The Holy Spirit Is Given (John 20:22). He Works Faith When And Where It Pleases God (John 3: 8). He Works Faith When And Where It Pleases God.....That Means We Are Not In Charge Of Results.... God Is. It Means That We Don't Build The Church....God Does As Jesus Says In Matthew's Gospel: **"I Will Build My Church" (16: 18, Esv).**

Conclusion: So Then.....God Simply Wants Us To Be Faithful....Like A Farmer Who Sows The Seed. The Word **"Faithful"** Shows Up Forty-Three Times In The New Testament. Sometimes It Refers To God.....Who Is Always Faithful.....But Many Times It Refers To God's People. And On The Judgment Day This Is What Jesus Will Say To Those Who Have Trusted In Him: **'Well Done, Good And... Faithful Servant' (Matt. 25: 31, Esv).**The Real Temptation Of What Is Called The Church Growth Movement Is Trying To Be In Control Of Growing The Church. This Is A Denial Of God's Power To Grow The Church. During The Time Of The Reformation **Martin Luther** Knew That Only God's Word Can Grow The Church As He Said In A Sermon: **"I Simply Taught, Preached, And Wrote God's Word; Otherwise I Did Nothing. And While I Slept [Cf. Mark 4: 26-29], Or Drank Wittenberg Beer With My Friends Philipp And Amsdorf, The Word So Greatly Weakened The Papacy That No Prince Or Emperor Ever Inflicted Such Losses Upon It. I Did Nothing; The Word Did Everything" (Luther's Works, Vol. 51 Sermons, March 10, 1522, Page 77).** God Has Given Us His Holy Word To Preach And Teach...And To Share With Others.....Both His Law That Condemns Our Sin And His Precious Gospel That Forgives Our Sin. And This Morning Jesus Has Taught Us That He Wants Us To Be Like A Farmer Who Trusts In The Seed That He Sows To Produce Crops....May God Bless Us To Be Faithful In The Sowing Of God's Word, Trusting That It Too Will Produce The Results That He Wants. Amen.

\* The Book Of Concord, Reader's Edition, Cph, 2005, 170: 5.