

## Jesu Juva

### “Seeds of the Kingdom”

Text: Mark 4:26-34; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Ezekiel 17:22-24

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I don't think it a stretch to say that every one of us here today knows someone who does not believe that we wish would believe. A friend, a neighbor, a family member . . . We want them to know their Saviour. We want them to know how much Jesus loves them and that He died for them. We want them to know and have the assurance with us, as St. Paul said today, *that if* [or more probably *when*] *the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*. We want them to be part of the family of faith, part of the Church, with us.

And it's frustrating and sad when they're not. If it were up to us, they would be. At least, that's how we imagine it. We'd tell them about Jesus, they would rejoice in this message, and believe - right then and there, on the spot. Maybe sometimes that happens; but more often not. More often our words about Jesus and the Church are met with indifference, ridicule, hostility, or that we have some sort of mental defect for believing such a preposterous tale. That has been the opinion of some about Christians from the days of the twelve all the way down our day today. So maybe it is more accurate to say that if it were up to us, no one would believe! Or at least, far fewer.

But the good news we heard today is that it is not up to us. The Church is God's and only He makes it grow. Only He can. Which is to say that it is a miracle. The Church is the creation of God, the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not scientific, not something we can control. That may be frustrating at times, but it is better. For what God does is always better than what we do. And His *ways* always better than ours.

Now that's not an obvious statement to make, for as has been reported much in the news recently, and as it's not hard to see, the Church seems to have been in decline for a while. There are less people in the pews every Sunday, less identifying themselves as Christians, and less believing and living by God's Word. It seems as if God and His ways aren't working . . . or aren't working very well anymore.

But Jesus tells us today how it is. That *the kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.*

Think about that for a moment. How seeds grow. When I plant seeds, sometimes they grow and sometimes not. Sometimes they take a long time to come up and sometimes they come up fast. And sometimes in my zeal to help things along I actually mess everything up and kill the very seeds and plants I was trying to make grow. Truth is, they don't need my help. Like the 50,000 little maple trees growing all over my yard this year because for some reason there was a bumper crop of those little helicopters descending from the trees this year! I didn't plant them; in fact, I couldn't stop them! Or to use Jesus' words, I just slept and rose, night and day, and the seeds did the rest.

And so the Church scatters seed. The Church - and when I say the Church I mean pastors and people, in the church building and outside of here - the Church proclaims the Word of God. *Ideally* like all those little helicopters coming down, all over the place. And then *we live by faith and not by sight*. That just as God causes seeds to grow in nature, so He will cause the seed of His Word to grow in the hearts of those who hear. That you and I are here today are proof that He does. You're not here because you got it all figured out, that you broke the code, that you somehow worked faith up in your heart - no. You're here because the seed of God's Word was planted in your heart and it grew through the power and work of the Holy Spirit. For some maybe it was quick, for others maybe it took a long time. We don't know what is happening under the ground when seeds are planted; or how the Word is working in hearts that we cannot see. But we trust that it is, for Jesus said that it is. And that He is producing a harvest. A harvest that in the end, we just may be surprised by.

The other thing we cannot judge by is the size of the seed. That's the second parable Jesus told today - that *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, 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*.

Big seeds do not always produce big plants and little seeds do not always produce little plants. And so maybe it looks like the word that the pastor speaks, the sermons and such, are big seeds, impressive seeds, that would grow the biggest plants and produce the most fruit. And maybe the Word that you speak seems little and unimpressive. But don't judge by that. You just might be surprised at what God is able to do, what God is able to grow, through the little seeds that you sow, through the Word that you speak, to friends and family and neighbors. Maybe you can't see it right now; maybe all the growth right now is underground. *But the Word of God is working; the Spirit of God is working; the kingdom of God is growing*.

My parents didn't think they were doing anything special in our family, but God grew two pastors from the Word that they planted. I remember a few years ago speaking with a now sainted man who was struggling with some theology and whether he could join our congregation. I spent many hours with him, but it was one of you who spoke to him and

through whom God worked the growth. As we heard from the prophet Ezekiel: ***I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it.***

Maybe it's not as fast as we want, maybe not the way we want, but the Word of God is working; the Spirit of God is working; the kingdom of God is growing. The Church scatters the seed, proclaims the Word, but the growth and the harvest belong to the Lord.

And His methods are not the same as ours. We may not even agree with them. Consider what He said through Ezekiel: ***I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish.*** That's probably the exact opposite of what we would do. Yet God knows what is necessary to grow His kingdom. When we're high and full of ourselves, He might bring us low; and then the low and weak and meek grow high and strong. And maybe He'll dry us up to give us life; to kill whatever in us is hindering the growth of His Word. That we have strong, deep roots not here in this world and life, but in Him and His life. To grow up in Him to eternal life.

And God is doing it. Through all times and ages, movements and philosophies and the attacks of false religions, though satan never rests, *the Word of God is working; the Spirit of God is working; the kingdom of God is growing.*

For, in fact, God has done it. He planted a seed *even smaller than a mustard seed* - the seed that caused His Son to become man in the womb of Mary. Nobody but a handful of people even noticed - or cared. Then His birth in Bethlehem - just another boy born into the world among how many that day? He grew up - we don't even know much about that; no one took much notice and so didn't write anything down. And then even when He was crucified - just one of thousands executed by the Romans that brutal way. But *unlike* every other one in this way: that was no mere man on that one cross, but God's Son. And He was not crucified for His own wrongs, but for yours. And He was not crucified against His will, but He laid down His life there for you, in your place. *And then He was planted into the ground . . .* and then the Word of God made flesh was raised by the Spirit of God and the kingdom of God grew. A plant so large that it has filled the earth. Believers, Christians, on every continent find rest in Him. And so the dry, dead tree of the cross God has made the lush green tree - the **tree of life** for all the world.

You'll hear that truth spoken in our liturgy in just a few moments - just before we receive the fruits of His cross, His tree of life, the Body and Blood of Jesus that hung there, and then sprung from the ground. He spoke it, and He has done it.

For God always does what He speaks. His Spirit works through the Word that is proclaimed and scattered throughout the world. Those baptized by water and His Word really are made His sons and daughters - even if they reject that gift later and walk away from their Father and their Church family. His Word of absolution really does give the forgiveness it proclaims. And that's really His Body and Blood that His Word makes so

on the altar, *given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins*, to feed you the life that you need. *The Word of God is working; the Spirit of God is working; the kingdom of God is growing.*

And so those friends, neighbors, family members . . . be patient. Don't doubt, and don't worry. Keep sowing the seed, speaking the Word. That Word. About Jesus. About what He has done. The cross. For you. For all. For them. Not because we're good, but because we're not. Not to make you good, but to you His child. Not to put you to work, but to give you rest, in His tree, in His kingdom. And maybe one day you'll wake up and see a whole lot of little trees growing all over your yard!

And know that His Word is working in you too. Growing repentance, growing faith, growing His children. *The Word of God is working; the Spirit of God is working.* And rejoice that He is - not as you see, but as He has promised.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.