

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“Life is in the Seed”

Rev. David K. Groth

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The Parables of the Seed Growing (Mk. 4:26-29)

The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. “A man” the text says. It’s indefinite. The weight and meaning doesn’t rest on the man. Anyone can scatter seed . . . young or old, male or female. The important thing is that the seed gets into the earth, into human hearts, because the life is in the seed. The earth simply lies there. It doesn’t reach out for the seed or call for the seed. Nor will unbelieving hearts. The Word must be planted.

You know and believe the Gospel, therefore you have seed to plant. So long as that seed remains in the packet, it does no good. It needs to get into the soil. Anyone can plant seed, but some have talked themselves out of it. Some are so humble they’re useless. Others are so afraid to cause offence they’ve lost their voices. You have the seed. It begs to be planted.

A man scattered seed on the ground. There are pastors who have a certain charisma. They draw people like moths to the light. (You don’t have that problem here!) I call it a problem because the danger is the ministry starts coalescing around the personality of the pastor. Then it’s no longer about the seed; it’s about the cult of the man scattering the seed, which leaves the church very vulnerable because he’s going to die, or move on, or get himself in trouble. Then what?

This parable is about the seed because life is in the seed. Night and day, whether the farmer sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. The life is in the seed! Of course, there’s the soil and rain and sunshine and fertilizer and so on. But without the seed, none of that would matter. We can frustrate it and hinder it. But only the seed has the power within it to sprout and grow. At some point, all the farmer can do is wait for the seed to do what it’s going to do. He is forced to be patient. He has to trust the seed will do what God has designed it to do. No amount of worrying or nervous pacing will hasten the seed to sprout and grow. Sometimes we seed-planters get it into our heads that success and failure, fruit and harvest are dependent on our energy, our creativity, our intelligence. We must trust the seed and wait for the seed to do what it’s going to do.

That’s easier said than done, isn’t it? Every farmer, every gardener, has a nagging little doubt in the back of their mind that maybe the seed isn’t going to work. After all, there could be a late freeze, or too little rain, or too much rain. Sometimes, when things don’t go just as one had hoped, discouragement, even despair begin to set in. Anyone who sows seed knows the temptation to think that the Word is insufficient, inadequate to the task, and therefore untrustworthy. Moreover, nature’s growth happens so slowly that many have lost faith in the divine seed and sow other seed, but they will get nothing more than noxious weeds. This parable urges patience and trust. Without the farmer even lifting a finger, the seed will grow on its own. Granted, the seed looks so lowly and unimpressive compared to the world’s other allurements. Shouldn’t God use something more forceful, more potent, more compelling than just the slow and humble Word?

For years, I thought maybe the Lord would use some kind of disaster to challenge the cold, indifference of our nation and bring people back to Jesus en masse. But haven’t we just lived through such a time, with over 600,000 deaths in America to a virus? Instead of uniting us and bringing us back to our Savior, it has divided us as a nation, and those same divisions are also evident within congregations. Whatever the churches did in response, some were peeved that it was either too much and others that it wasn’t nearly

enough. So then, in a pandemic, everyone has a grievance (everyone) and some are still using those grievances as a cop out for not being in church. One can almost see the devil twitching his tail with glee over that triumph.

It has taught me a lesson, however. A disaster isn't going to drive people back to our Savior Jesus Christ. Only the Word of God can do that. The life of the Christian Church and of this congregation is not in a virus. It's in the seed. All that Good Shepherd needs and depends upon is in the Word alone!

For almost fifty years now that seed *has* sprouted and brought forth the fruits of faith here. Some of you were brought to faith through the faithful proclamation of the Word of God from this pulpit in the early seventies. Some of you entered the Kingdom of God through the waters of Holy Baptism within that very font. Many of you have learned to love the biblical narrative from faithful Sunday School teachers right here in this building. And here we often feed on Christ's body and blood. God has seen to it that His Word has been sown for you right here. And the Word has accomplished everything. The Word has done it all.

Martin Luther once said, "While I drink my little glass of Wittenberg beer, the Gospel runs its course." That is the finest thing I have ever heard said about beer. The conversion of a man is not something that can be forced or produced by man. Having sown the Word, Luther could cheerfully step down from the pulpit. He didn't need to fret and worry and go on incessantly. He could commend the fields to God, trust in the seed, and quietly drink his little glass of Wittenberg beer. The seed is going to do what it is going to do. The Law is going to tear down your idols and call you to repentance. The Gospel is going to soothe your contrite hearts with the forgiveness of sins. The Word calls you to turn from your sinful stubbornness and it delivers to you Christ's holy absolution, along with life, and salvation.

A man scatters the seed and it sprouts and grows, he knows not how. The planted Word produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. Seeds have the power of life in them. You've seen how an acorn can, with time, cause a concrete sidewalk to heave, crack and buckle. You've heard how seeds can lie dormant for a hundred years or more, and still be perfectly viable. Life is in the seed of God's Word. Eternal life is in that seed! That seed will indeed bring forth a crop by itself according to God's own timing.

The seed of God's Word doesn't look impressive, but then again, neither did the Word Incarnate. Jesus had no beauty or majesty or great charisma to attract us to Him. "Nothing in his appearance" Isaiah wrote, "that we should desire him" (Is. 53:2). The Word is a humble means, and it reveals a humble Savior. Jesus did not come with a show of power and force or great charisma. He did not come according to the expectations or the wisdom of the world. He came in humility. The almighty King of heaven and earth made Himself small. He came as the seed of the woman. He was born in lowly estate. He came to build the Kingdom not with military advances, but by the humble preaching of repentance and faith. He lowered Himself to endure scornful abuse and was condemned for crimes He did not commit. He made Himself the smallest of men to die the most humiliating of deaths. Then he was buried, deposited like a lowly little seed, in a borrowed tomb.

But there's life in the Seed. Hidden underneath all that humility and weakness and death, there is unstoppable life! Life for you and me and all sinners. And now, so long after His death and resurrection – now we can see the harvest approaching, as billions and billions of people trust in Him.

When we die, we too are planted like seeds in the ground. 1 Corinthians 15, "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power" (v. 42ff).

The life is in the seed. All that the Church needs is in the seed, the seed of God's Word. The Word of God is sown in our hearts, and it bears fruit. The Word does what it does. It brings forth a harvest all by itself according to God's own timing. Thanks be to God! Amen.