



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 17, 2018

“The Miracle of Seeds”

(Mark 4:26-27)

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“This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how” (Mk. 4:26-27).

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: Blessed Lord, since You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

There are probably miracles happening all around us but they are so common and familiar that we don't think of them as miracles. Seeds may be an example. Pale, shriveled, small, dry, inert, everything about them looks dead. If we didn't know any better, there's nothing about them that would suggest they could turn into beautiful flowers or massive trees or productive crops. But we've learned to trust in the miracle of seeds. So we plant beans for instance, and days later the tightly rolled leaf of a bean plant pushes up, carrying the spent case of the bean with it. Light sensitivity makes one shoot go up, because it's drawn to the light, and one shoot goes down, because it is repelled by light. Who taught it how to do that?

And who taught the maple tree how to manufacture those little helicopter seeds that will fly with the breeze? (Does a tree have its own research and development department?) The pine cone of the jack pine is held together tight by a resin that will only melt under extreme temperatures. This releases the seed, which enables the tree to be among the first to repopulate an area destroyed by forest fire. God delegates a lot of the work of disseminating seeds to birds. They eat the flesh of berries, but the seed passes through in good order and is deposited along with a little fertilizer, which is brilliant if you ask me! The big, round, green seed from the Black Walnut is so large that it can roll downhill to get away from mom and dad and find some sunlight. Squirrels are also helpful in planting the next generation of walnuts and oaks, because they often forget where they buried their caches of food. Other seeds, like the burdock, hitch a ride on shoe laces or a dog's tail.

The dissemination of seeds seems haphazard and accidental, but there's wisdom and order behind it and it works; it works well! We've learned that seeds can be trusted, in spite of their looks. Farmers pay a lot of money for seeds, and then, in effect, scatter

their money across a field, trusting the seeds to do what they're designed to do.

In this wonderful little parable, Jesus taught that, like seed, the Word works. It doesn't look impressive, it doesn't yield immediate results, but when the seed of God's Word is planted, there will be a harvest.

But it needs to be planted. Seeds do no good bagged up and sitting in a farmer's shed. In fact, as it sits there, it starts losing some of its virility. So if not for the mouth, then for the soil!

In the same way, God's Word needs to be consumed but also planted. We are called to give his Word the opportunity to germinate and grow. This starts of course close to home. God's command is to keep the Sabbath Day holy, so that his word can be sown into our hearts, not just once but in an on-going way. This good work continues through the week, with daily devotions, or listening to the Word set to music, or reading to your young children the stories from God's Word. Seeds are meant to be consumed but also planted.

Keep in mind there are some fields, some folks only you have access to. You have the access, the relationship and the trust. So take the risk, and plant a few seeds. Encourage your friend at work with God's Word, the one who is going through a divorce. When you go to the hospital to visit someone, share your favorite passage with them and tell them why it's your favorite. Give his Word half a chance. In 2 Timothy 3, the promise is God's Word makes us wise for salvation.

Of course, it doesn't always work like we want it to. Cold and dry is good for a martini, not so much for the germination of seeds. When the soil is cold and dry, the seeds will not be able to do much of anything. There's nothing wrong with the seed; it's the soil that won't allow the seed to germinate.

Many hearts and minds are cold and dry. You plant, and plant, and plant and nothing happens, nothing changes. It doesn't germinate. That's the discouraging part. Often

there's so little to show for the investment you've made. You might be tempted to think, "What's the use? Why bother?" But farmers and gardeners have to be patient, as do preachers and teachers and anyone who dares to share the Word with another. Sometimes, all you can do is wait.

After all, this parable teaches it's not by any human effort that the seed works. Jesus says whether the farmer is asleep or up and about makes no difference; the seed sprouts and grows on its own. If it happens, it will happen in God's time and in God's way, not by human effort. Our part of the deal is to plant the seed as best we can. When we've done that, we've done what God has called us to do. The flip side is when we've not done that, (as a church or as individuals), then we've not done what God has called us to do.

By the way, this last week the seed of God's Word was planted in about a hundred little kids here at Good Shepherd. It took a lot of work by a lot of people, but it was done well, and it was done winsomely. Will that seed produce a harvest? Time will tell. But those who helped with VBS did what was in their power to do. There are a lot of variables we cannot control, but we can control whether or not we plant the seed. Even when there are no immediate or measureable results, we keep planting the seed of God's Word, because it is doing what God has called us to do, and there's reward enough in that.

We all have seed to plant, but it needs to get out of the shed and into the fields. Parents, that's your highest calling . . . to plant the seed of the Word in your children. Grandparents, that's your highest calling . . . to plant the seed of the Word in your grandchildren, hopefully reinforcing what the parents are doing, or, if the parents have abdicated that responsibility, planting in their place.

Seeds summon us to plant. Seeds summon us also to be patient. In the parable, the farmer plants the seed but is then mostly out of the parable until the harvest. Remember, this is a parable. This laid-back approach is not a true picture of farming today. A crop left to fend for itself after having been planted would probably not be worth harvesting.

But the point of the parable is the miracle is not in the one who does the planting. The miracle is in the seed. So if the seed sprouts and grows, don't give yourself too much credit. And it fails to sprout and grow, don't be too discouraged, or start pointing fingers. Our job is to plant and be patient.

In 1973, archaeologist Ehud Netzer was doing a dig at Masada, Herod's fortress on top of a small Judean mountain overlooking the Dead Sea. While excavating the site, Netzer found some date seeds dating back nearly 2000 years. He gave them to a botanical archaeologist at the University of Tel Aviv named Mordechai Kislev. The seeds sat untouched in his desk drawer for another three decades. (Things like that happen. I have some gum in my desk drawer that's probably about that old.) Eventually, the seeds got into the hands of some botanists who wanted to see if the seeds would germinate. In 2005, they soaked the seeds first in hot water, then in a solution of nutrients, and then planted them. Days later, the seeds germinated! The first leaves to come out were pale and sickly, almost white. But soon followed green healthy leaves. They named the plant Methuselah, after the oldest person in the Bible and determined that Methuselah is a particular type of Judean date palm that had been extinct for over 1500 years. Today, he's a big boy, over 10 feet tall, a male tree producing healthy pollen. They've found some more ancient fig seeds that have now sprouted and are growing and have determined they are female, capable of producing fruit. So they're planning an ancient date grove, to see what kind of dates they ate 2,000 years ago, and how they differ from dates today.

It makes me think of folks we know and love, maybe our children, or grandchildren, now adults, and in spite of all our work, all the seeds planted over the years, yet today, there's little or no evidence of faith. It's so discouraging and sad and alarming. But you know what? There's a date palm plant growing today in Israel which came from a seed that took **2000 years** to germinate.

Maybe you'll never see the germination of those

seeds planted in your children. Maybe that will happen long after you and I are gone. In any event, you've planted the seed. You've done your job. And now trust in the Holy Spirit to do his work in the hearts and minds of people. Remember also that wherever our loved ones are in this world, the people of God are probably very near, doing what God's has called them to do: planting the seed of God's Word. If those seeds sprout and grow, it will happen in God's time and in God's way. "I planted the seed" Paul wrote, "Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Cor. 3:6-7).

Seeds: so pale and shriveled and small . . . their initial impact is almost always underwhelming and unimpressive. It's often discouraging work proclaiming the kingdom of God. But don't underestimate the power of seeds. Trust in the miracle. God desires to save people, and His word is powerful, and wherever it is planted, it will, in the end, yield a harvest of souls to the glory of God and to the great and eternal joy of his people. Amen.

