

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST June 16, 2024

INTRODUCTION TO THEMES FOR THE DAY AND SEASON

As Mark's Gospel carries us through Jesus' life and its significance, one gets a sense of the mystery of it all. Not like Murdoch mysteries where good detective work and a little luck resolve cases; more like the sense of wonder in the presence of things we can't really understand or explain...like that way of being Mark describes as the kingdom of God.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, you are the tree of life, offering shelter to all the world. Graft us into yourself and nurture our growth, that we may bear your truth and love to those in need, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen

GOSPEL Mark 4:26-34

26He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

30He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

33With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Sermon:

When I studied advertising back in the 80's we learned that the most effective hook in writing ad copy was the phrase "how to"...like how to get rid of ring around the collar. If we can buy the right detergent thereby eradicating ring around the collar, surely we can figure out what currency we need to get ahead in life and maybe even punch our ticket into the kingdom of God, right?

Once upon a time a very wealthy person well acquainted with getting things done asks Jesus "how to" get in to the kingdom of God. Jesus tells him sell everything and give it to the poor. In one fell swoop Jesus challenges each word in the person's question..."*what....must...I...do*"

There's no what for you to do

...and you aren't the doer so...

forget about the doing.

The Gospel writer in writing about the mustard seed sprinkles in some humour that gets lost in translation... the mustard seed becomes the biggest vegetable a veggie plant so large that also gives shade and shelter. The near comical abundance of the mustard seed reminds me of our life in a farming town of a couple hundred people. Nobody locked their houses. Nobody knew where the key to the church building was because no one needed it. Sometimes UPS drivers actually delivered packages to our unlocked cars when they were parked in town instead of 20-30 miles away at the farm. We newcomers were advised that we should lock our cars in mid to late summer to prevent people from leaving all their surplus zucchini from their gardens on your front seat. Even savvy gardeners and farmers wonder where all that zucchini could have come from! The punch line here is that "*Grace happens*". Those seeds have a life of their own and as Mark's Gospel describes these random seeds as 'blasting off' and says the seeds says they "growing long"—sometimes while we're sleeping. So it is with God's ways of doing and being in the world.

As we sit in a church sanctuary, we might think church is the only locus for God's activity we call the kingdom of God. Someone recently remarked to me that God's

kingdom is everywhere...maybe this person was reading her Small catechism about the Lord's Prayer. We might be surprised to learn that Martin Luther writes that God's agenda goes forth whether we pray for it or not. We pray that it might be done in us; individually and as a faith community such as the church(ELW page 1163).

PS...sort of: Jesus explains the parables to the disciples. Guess what? They still don't always get it. Mark's Gospel trots out scores of instances large and small when the disciples lose the plot. The Good News is that God delights in being God and doing what God does—with us, without us and maybe sometimes in spite of us. In God's governance, even while we sleep, the seeds fall, they blast off and grow long and wild...and as a colleague of mine likes to say, "It's a God thing".