

Master of the Storm
Mark 4:26-32

Congregational Psalm: 104:1-9
Isaiah 40:18-26
Matthew 8:14-27

this morning I want to start out by reading verse's 21-32 as a quick review and start up for this morning. So we see that Jesus is continuing his use of the imagery of a farming, of planting seeds and he is using it as a way to explain the mystery of the gospel. This telling of this parable appears here exclusively in the book of Mark, it does not show up in any of the other gospels. But it would seem that it's purpose is to fully expound on the previous parable of the sower.

So the first thing that we will notice here in verse 26 is the similarity to the method that is used to the method used in the parable of the sower. The Kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. Once again we see no preparation, not much care as to where the seed is thrown, but it is thrown indiscriminately on the ground. The first parable emphasis is on the growth of the seed, and the harvest, but this parable, and the one to follow emphasizes the contrast between the beginning and the end.

Jesus says that this small seed is like the Kingdom of God. I am sure that this language would have shocked these men, as it probably would us today if we have never heard it before. When I think of the kingdom of God, I do not think of a little seed, but rather something grand, and glorious, yet he says here it is like this seed thrown on the ground. This just furthers what he said in verse's 11 and 12. It is shrouded in mystery and only understood by those it has been given to be understood. Jesus is a sort of paradox, God, yet man, a King, yet a poor carpenter's son, yet he teaches with the authority of the scribes, and performs healings, and casts out demons in the likes that has never been seen before.

Much it is the same way with the gospel, with the kingdom of God. How is that through the foolishness of preaching that man can be saved? From a worldly point of view, we are all about actions and rewards. Do good things, get rewarded, that is how we are raised, that is how society is supposed to work, it is the central truth to mankind, or at least we think so. I think that is the draw to continue to attempt to follow parts of the old covenant, and while those who still hold to old covenant theology would argue that they are not doing so to be justified, there is an element that doing so will garnish some sort of reward. There is a subtle idea that if you keep the sabbath, in the way that the reformed church has deemed worthy, and if you use the mosaic moral code applied to your life then you will be blessed for doing so.

This kind of idea appeals to us, yet Christ is a paradox isn't he? He does not call us to practice some flashy ceremonies, or to set ourselves apart from this world by some ritualistic actions, or even by holding to certain traditions. But rather he says, in John 13:34, 35. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." And by this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Like what James says in chapter 2, verse 5-13 "Listen, my beloved brethren, Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs to the kingdom which he promised to those who love him? Verse 8, if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself but you show partiality you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors."

Just like this small seed representing the kingdom of God is a paradox to what mankind expects, and just as Jesus was a paradox to what the Jews expected that the messiah would be, so is the way of salvation, through faith. Which is the point of these parables we are looking at today.

Verse 26- 28,” And he said, The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.” Jesus likens the kingdom of God to the process of a plant growing. Notice he says, the farmer goes to sleep and wakes up to find the plant growing, but he does not know how. This is a picture of the mystery of salvation. The changing of a person heart of stone becoming a heart of flesh able and willing to hear, and understand the word of God.

Science tells us that a seed contains everything that it needs to become exactly what it is suppose to be. An apple seed does not become a pear tree, a seed grows into exactly what it is suppose to be. It is much the same way with Salvation, the seed of God's word will grow in the hearts of those who have faith in Christ, and this salvation does not turn into rebellion, but it continues to grow bearing fruit of our salvation. That brings us back to the first parable of the sower, notice the only seed the bears fruit is that which lands upon the good soil. Sure, there are some that seem to sprout, but they wither and die bearing no fruit. It is the same with us, if we are claiming God as our father, then we will have the works, and fruit of him, which is faith, love, and patience.

But how this works is a mystery, just like this farmer who plants seeds and goes about his daily business to one day find that his seeds have now grown and are bearing fruit it is the same with the ministry, with sharing the gospel, with preaching, and teaching. Just like in this picture of the mysterious growth of seed which happens hidden and unknown to the farmer so it is with salvation. When the gospel is shared, there is no way for us to know if or when it has taken root, that is something that only God knows. We see this with the accounts of the multitudes. 1000's of people heard the teachings of Jesus, yet we don't hear about 1000's of them believing upon him. But there are some, we see glimpses of these people who go away believing.

This reference of putting the sickle to the harvest often symbolizes the coming of the Kingdom of God. This isn't just a reference to the final judgement, but serves as a reminder that this kingdom of God is ever present, ever growing. There is always new seeds being planted, new plants bearing fruit, and new fruit being harvested. There is a tendency to always be looking to the future for the arrival of the kingdom of God. In the time of Jesus there was the Zealots who were seeking to bring in and force the kingdom of God by staging a revolution against the Roman occupation. The Pharisee's believed that the kingdom could be encouraged to arrive by their strict adherence to the mosaic code.

This parable warns to not have this mindset, showing that the kingdom of god is present, and constant. It is not some distant future but is here, now. That being said, there is also the element of the future coming of Christ, coming to gather up the harvest when the time has come. To quote James Edwards, “Just like the patient farmer, Jesus is supremely confident in the coming kingdom. Thought beset by opposition from religious leaders and misunderstandings from followers, Jesus is not disheartened, distraught, or desperate. Nor should there be any anxiety among his disciples.

The faith that God requires of his disciples is to sleep and rise in humble confidence that God has invaded this troubled world not with a crusade but with a seed, an imperceptible seed that will grow into a full harvest.”

Jesus continues on in verse 30, “To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground is smaller than all the seeds on the earth, but when it is sown it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.” This parable of the mustard seed is similar to the previous ones but is used to show another aspect of the Kingdom of God. The sower showed the spreading of the word, the work of the farmer doing so. The 2nd shows the growth of that seed, unbeknownst to the farmer and this final parable shows a contrast of this tiny mustard seed growing into a large bush, large enough to house birds.

In this parable we see a picture of the kingdom of God which comes from what the world would see as a humble, small, insignificant beginning, no one would ever imagine that a child born in a manger to two insignificant people would come the messiah, the God man, to reconcile the world to himself. In what appears to be the smallest is in fact the greatest. This faith that is hidden, this kingdom that appears to be small on this earth will one day be revealed to the greatest kingdom.

Old Testament prophets often used the imagery of birds nesting in branches to allude to Gentiles being included among God's chosen people. In addition to the surprising growth of the Kingdom of God from such a small insignificant start we see that it provides a resting place for all to come. This kingdom is not only for the Israelite, but it is also for the Gentile. It shows that out of the most insignificant beginning, invisible to the human eye, God creates his mighty kingdom which embraces all peoples of the world.

Closing out this section of Parables here in Mark he starts just as he began. Verse 3 of Chapter 3 Jesus implores everyone to Listen, in verse 23 of chapter 4 he says if anyone has ears to hear, let them hear. And here in verse 33 he says “And with many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. Once again Mark is restating the fact that parables enlighten, or obscure depending on the ability of the one to hear. Those who hear find in them deep meaning, and revealing to the mysteries of God, but those who are unable to hear find parables confusing and opaque. This ability to hear determines if one is an insider or an outsider, it is the first step that leads to fellowship with Jesus where fuller understanding comes possible. For Jesus only explained them to those who were his close followers, those who were in his inner circle, those who it was given to hear and understand.

Verse 35 Mark says on the same day, when evening had come Jesus said to them let us cross over to the other side. Now when they had left the multitude, they took him along the boat as he was. And other little boats were also with him. “It would seem that Jesus actually had a fairly sizeable following of disciples at this point, for they took multiple boats across the sea of Galilee. Mark does not state here Jesus' reason for going to the other side but as we have seen in chapter 1, verse 38 Jesus did not seem to like to stay in one location for very long, always seeking to go to new areas to teach. Verse 35 chapter 1. “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, he went out and departed to a solitary place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him. When they found him they said to him, everyone is looking for you, but he said to them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also because for this purpose I have come forth.”

So it isn't a far stretch to think that this is the reason that Jesus wanted to go across the sea, to go to a new town and to reach new people. And as we see in verse 37, a great storm rising up with is threatening to sink these boats. This account here in Mark is a much more vivid account than what we see in the Gospel of Matthew, or Luke. Mark includes the time of day in verse 34, on the same day that he taught these parables in the evening they crossed the sea. Also Mark notes that Jesus leaves in the same boat that he was in while teaching to the multitudes, and mentioning that there were other small boats with them hints at the fact that Jesus had more disciples than just the 12.

An interesting side note here, in verse 38 is the only record of Jesus sleeping in any of the gospel books. And the only place that is mentioned about him sleeping is during a massive storm threatening to sink the ship. Also here in Mark we see the response of his disciples is one that is slightly more pointed than what we see recorded in Matthew and Luke. Matthew 8:25 has the tone more of a prayer, of someone acting out of faith knowing that Jesus could calm the storm. It says, "Then his disciples came to him and awoke him saying, Lord save us, we are perishing! The way it is recorded in Luke is more set in an informative tone, verse 24, "And they came to him and awoke him saying, Master Master, we are perishing! And in Mark, we see frustration, panic and fear in their response. While they feel that they will certainly perish, Jesus lies asleep so they rush in saying, Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

It is widely believed that Mark who was a understudy of Peter used Peter's account of this storm in his writing, with the purpose of showing that Jesus is God incarnate. Many scholars believe that the crassness of Mark's recording of the disciples to Jesus was a direct quote and was not smoothed over in the retelling with the sensitivities of responding to Jesus the Messiah. At this point the Disciples still did not have a full understanding of Jesus and we can see that in this sort of rebuke of Jesus sleeping during this storm. We can determine this because of Jesus' response to them after he awakens and calms the storm, verse 40 and 41. "But he said to them, why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

So it makes sense this sort of panicked crass response that the disciples had, for they do not yet fully understand and grasp who Jesus is, that he is God incarnate, who has not only the authority to heal the sick, and cast out demons, but also the authority over nature itself. They marvel saying who can this be, for they know that it is only God who can control the wind and the sea.

I also find it interesting Jesus' response to the panicking disciples, asking them why are they so fearful, do they have no faith? After all of the things that they had witnessed, and the things that had been revealed to them they were afraid that their boat would sink and they would perish, along with Jesus who they were believing to be the messiah. In the parable of the mustard seed Jesus gives them an insight into the workings of faith in God, and he uses the example of the mustard seed recorded in Matthew in regards to their level of faith, saying that if they had the faith the size of a mustard seed they could tell the mountains to be removed into the sea. But here he says, how is it that you have no faith?

It is clear that the purpose that this even served was to greater teach the disciples about faith, and about who Jesus truly is. We see their lack of faith in him with their response feeling like God has abandoned them to die in the storm but this story stands to prove that no matter what forces befall them, in the midst of turmoil it only took a word from God to calm the storm. I am sure this is a lesson that stuck with them and it is just as relevant to us today.

Often times we can get caught up in the turmoils of life, the temptations, the trials, and maybe persecution, but God promises to care for us, to provide for us, to give us the grace to see it through and to come out on the other side victorious, even in death, we shall rise to meet him in victory through the blood of his Son Jesus Christ. Sometimes we seemingly lose faith, we can be like the disciples here, we panic, we fret, we may cry out to God why is it like this? Just like Paul who said he pleaded with God 3 times to remove his infirmities, that he referred to as the thorn in the flesh. But God's response was My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Which also should be our response, not one of panic like Mark's record of the disciples being tossed around in the storm while Jesus slept, but one of faith, knowing that God gives us the grace sufficient for our needs, and it is ultimately about Him and His glory, and not us and our problems. In the case of Paul he never removed the ailment that Paul suffered from and Paul recognized that it was a tool of God used to buffet him, to weaken him so that in his weakness God's strength is made perfect. Having this understanding that even our suffering whatever form it may come to us, is for God, to bring him glory so that his grace and strength may shine through our weakness. So we are ever reminded of our dependence upon him, that everything we have, everything that we are has been given to us by him. And that is the point of these parables, to broaden our understanding of God, to understand our place, and our role in his sovereign plan.

To live out our lives in faith, even when the storms arise. Knowing that God is in control of all things, so we can go about this ministry that we have been given with confidence, with purpose, spreading the seeds of the word of God across all fields trusting that he will provide for himself a harvest.