

Pentecost 4B [July 6, 2003] (A Sermon by Rev. Ron Friedrich)
 Gospel lesson for July 6, 2003

MARK 4:26-34

26. Jesus said, "God's kingdom is the same-as a man throwing seeds on the ground.

27. The man sleeps at night and wakes-up in the morning. At the same time the seed grows, but the man doesn't understand how.

28. The ground makes the seed grow and blossom; first the green leaf, then the small grain, and finally the full grown WHEAT.

29. When the WHEAT is ready, the man starts to work to pick the good WHEAT."

30. Jesus said, "What can we say about God's kingdom? What comparison story can we tell?

31. God's kingdom is the same-as a tiny MUSTARD seed. That is the smallest of all seeds in the world.

32. A man takes that seed and puts that in the ground, and it grows to become a large tree. It grows large that birds come and make homes in the branches."

33. Jesus told many comparison stories to teach the people God's word. Jesus told them only the things they could understand.

34. Jesus always spoke to the people with comparison stories. But happened that Jesus was alone with HIS friends, Jesus explained everything to them.

A story about seed again.

Jesus loved to tell stories.

Sometimes His stories had a clear meaning.

Sometimes His stories had a hidden meaning.

Sometimes Jesus explained the stories.

Many times Jesus finished the story without explanation, and we must guess what He means. ...as both of today's stories.

Jesus said, "God's kingdom is the same-as a man throwing seeds on the ground."

SEEDS. We had a story in the past about seed, in different kinds of soil. For that story, Jesus explained: The seed means God's Word. More exactly, the seed means the Gospel, Good News about forgiveness we have from Jesus Christ. The seed is the story about the reason Jesus He suffered and died for us on the cross. The seed is the Good News about eternal life God offers to us in Jesus Christ.

? Does seed in the story today also mean God's Word?

I think, yes.

"A man threw seed on the ground."

A FARMER. Jesus has many stories about farmers and their business. Often, the farmer represents God. But not in this story.

Jesus said, "The man sleeps at night and wakes-up in the morning. At the same time the seed grows, but the man doesn't understand how."

That farmer is not God. God doesn't sleep. People sleep, not God. We people understand... only a little-bit. But God truly understands everything.

If the **seed** means God's Word, then the **farmer** means a Christian who share God's Word -- the Good News about Jesus -- with other people, who do not-yet know Him. The farmer can mean preachers and teachers, yes. But the farmer can also mean any of us who share our faith in Christ with our friends.

Now for the story, we have

- [1] the SEED,
- [2] the FARMER, and also
- [3] the SOIL.

Who or what means the soil?

In the other story about seed, Jesus explained the soil means people who receive God's Word. We can assume that same meaning for the seed in today's story.

Jesus said, "God's kingdom is the same-as a man throwing seeds on the ground. The man sleeps at night and wakes-up in the morning. At the same time the seed grows, but the man doesn't understand how. The ground makes the seed grow and blossom..."

What's the point?

A Christian tells someone who is not Christian about Jesus. Will that person (the non-Christian) immediately accept and believe everything? Of-course not!

Now what does his Christian friend do?

Maybe Christian will give-up, thinking, "I failed." or "My friend rejected Jesus [Finish!]." ...Wrong.

Or the Christian make the opposite mistake. If the Christian thinks that he (the Christian) himself is responsible to make his friend believe in Jesus, maybe he will try to pressure his friend to believe.

That is like a farmer, planting a seed, but not satisfied to wait for the seed to grow by itself. The farmer will try to hurry to make the seed grow fast, pouring on more FERTILIZER. What will happen? That stupid farmer will ruin the soil, and kill all life in that seed. Then nothing will grow.

The wise farmer realizes that he is not responsible to make the seed grow. He can prepare the soil, but after he plants the seed, he needs to leave it alone, only to sometimes water it, and keep the weeds back. The seed takes time to grow roots. The seed takes time to change from a hard NUT to green STEM.

Faith in Jesus is the same way. We share God's Word. Then we wait. We pray. We show love. We serve. And, when it seems wise, we share more of God's Word.

It is God who makes faith grow in a person. We can't.

As the farmer never sees the seed growing in the soil, so we cannot see faith growing in our non-Christian friends.

Maybe a foolish farmer will check on his seed by digging up the soil. That only ruins a young baby plant. In the same way, if someone starts to have a baby faith, but he is not really ready to show his faith yet, a foolish Christian can damage that faith by trying to dig into his friend's private soul, where only God can see. The best thing the Christian can do is leave his friend's faith alone. Patiently wait for God take-care of his friend.

But what if faith never grows - the person you love never believes. What do you do? Give up?

Every farmer knows that not all seeds will grow. What does the farmer do. Give-up? No, farmer waits for the next season, next year. He will continue to prepare the soil, and when the time is right, he will plant more seeds.

We do the same with our non-Christian friends. We gently share Jesus with them, but they never trust Him. We wait. We love. We serve. We pray. And when the time is right, we share Jesus again. Then we continue waiting, and loving, and serving, and praying.

And then some day we may have the joy of the news of our friend trusting Jesus. We may be tempted to wonder what we said or what we did to finally make the person believe.

No, we did nothing. We only planted seed, God's Word. We don't know what happens between our friend and God, as God Himself brings our friend to faith.

Now, back to the story. We have more:

Jesus said, *"The ground makes the seed grow and blossom; first the green leaf, then the small grain, and finally the full grown WHEAT."*

When a farmer begins to see a green stem pop up from the soil, what does he do? Does the farmer stand back, to get out of the way for a full tree to explode from the soil? [Sign as a tree popping up very fast.] If farmer sees a small stem today, can he expect full fruit tomorrow?

Of course not!

But we Christians sometimes are that foolish. When a person first trusts Christ, he still has a baby faith. That new Christian still has all his old temptations. He still has his old habits. He still struggles with his old non-Christian attitudes. He still knows only very little about the Bible. He still knows only very little about how God works with us every day.

We must not expect new Christians to immediately become mature Christians. We must continue to... love, serve, pray, encourage, and teach.

Paul, in the Bible, understood, we must not expect too-much, too-fast, from new Christians. Paul said, "Don't choose a new believer for your deacon (church leader)." (1 Timothy 3:6)

We see Christians make this mistake, when a popular movie star or a famous athlete becomes a Christian. Churches invite them to come and share their testimony. We see interviews on Christian TV or in Christian magazines. We thrill in the story about how a sinner became saved. We forget that person is still a baby Christian, not ready for that kind of pressure, and not yet mature in their own walk with Christ.

Last year the Internet was excited with the news that JANE FONDA became a Christian. Remember: She was a popular movie star in the 1960s. She also made a lot of people mad when she supported Communists in North Viet Nam. Later she made exercise videos. And then she married TED TURNER; he manages a cable TV networks, and he makes-fun of Christians. JANE FONDA and TED TURNER separated. She was growing in her faith, and he didn't-want her to share Jesus with him.

After the news spread about her faith in Christ, several Christian leaders warned us, "Leave her alone! She is still very young in her faith. Don't bother her. Give her time to grow."

After that, we heard nothing more about JANE FONDA. ...Good.

Finishing our story: Jesus said, "*When the WHEAT is ready, the man starts to work to pick the good WHEAT.*"

When we share Jesus with non-Christian people, sometimes we have the pleasure of seeing faith and "fruit" in their lives. But most times, we never know how that seed, God's Word, will grow. God gives other Christians the responsibility for the "harvest," welcoming the new Christian into the church.

The Bible says: One person plants, another person gathers. But it is God who makes His Word grow. And in time, that little seed in one person's heart, grows to become a blessing to many, many other people, as Jesus' "Mustard Seed" story tells us.

Like the farmer in the story, let us continue throwing-out seed, God's Word. Let us continue telling people Jesus died and rose again for them. Let us continue sharing with our friends the answers God has for them in His Word. And they also can share His life, His hope, His love.

Amen.