

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear friends in Christ,

I have so much to share with you today, I'm just excited about God's Word that we're looking at today, and what it means for us and our church.

Now, having said that, it was also a difficult text to for me to think about all week because it convicted me. I think it's convicting to every pastor. And as we look at it, I think you'll find it convicts you as well. It highlights where we have been thinking wrongly about sharing God's Word with others, and reminds us of the truth.

Let's jump right in and take a look at two parables Jesus told to help people understand the Kingdom of God, and the power of the Word. I'm going to read right through and then we'll back up and understand what Jesus taught:

Mark 4:26-34 He also said, "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. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade." With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Jesus is teaching a series of parables.

What is a parable? Earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

First parable. Easy to understand. [Review] The seed is the Word of God. We are the sowers of the seed. But what is true of seed? Once it is sown, the farmer is powerless to make it grow. He can think about it continuously, watch it constantly, talk to it incessantly, wring his hands, worry. Or he can plant it and stop thinking about it completely. Either way, the seed will do what the seed will do. It will grow. That is not within the farmer's power, is it?

1) Proclaim then fret. Today's lesson is one that cuts right to the heart of every pastor. Preparing for the sermon this week, God convicted me. It's something I struggle with. I bet it's something you struggle with to sometimes. I tell someone the truth of God's Word. Perhaps it's a couple in my office for counseling. Or at the bedside of a sick or dying member. Or sharing Jesus with someone who is hearing it for the first time. Or explaining the truth to someone from a different church that believes differently. Whatever the exact circumstance, after talking to the person, I keep thinking about the situation. Did I say it in the best way? Did I show enough sympathy? Did I come on too strong... or did I not say it bluntly enough? Are they going to take it to heart? Will they believe what I said? Did I blow it? Should I have been more convincing? Was the timing wrong?

How useless! As if I have power to make that Word of God grow! Jesus teaches me that my job is to sow the seed of the Word. God's job is what happens after that.

Maybe you've sometimes struggled with this too. You've talked about Jesus with a relative or friend, and you desperately want them to believe. And you think about it all the time, and you agonize over it, and you wonder what you've done wrong that they don't yet believe. This is actually wrong thinking. Jesus says, "Stop worrying about it! After you share the Word, what happens next is out of your hands entirely. God is the one that makes the Word take root and grow. Your job is done. Don't try to take responsibility for what happens next. That is God's work.

2) Similar thinking can sometimes manifest itself in a different way. **A person doesn't proclaim Christ or his word to others.** Why? They think, I'm not very good at talking. I'm not a very eloquent. I'm not very persuasive. I don't know how to answer all the objections I would receive. What if they actually were interested? I wouldn't know how to keep building on however I start. There are far more gifted people at me who would be far better at bringing people to faith, and helping them grow in faith. Besides, my life isn't good enough. I'm not a good enough example. If I opened my mouth I would only do more harm than good.

But the parable again reminds us: It's not us. It's the Word. It is powerful and effective. It never returns empty, just as the rain falls from heaven and waters the earth. The Word falls and accomplishes the purpose for which God sent it.

3) So, we think about ourselves too much, and that is wrong. But sometimes the problem is that **we don't trust the power of the Word**, so we don't bother sowing it. How much growth could really occur? How much good could it actually do? How much could a small church like ours really grow? How far could Christianity really spread? We really ought not expect much. Therefore, it's not that important to sow the seed. The second parable addresses this foolish thinking:

Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."

So which sin resonated most with you? Do you ruminate after witnessing, fretting the outcome? Do you not witness because you're not worthy, and so it wouldn't work anyway? Do you doubt the power of the Word? Or that it would have much of an effect? Jesus leads us to repent.

The very Word we are talking about is the Word you have heard and believe. And the miracle is this: your sins relating to this Word and its proclamation? They are forgiven. The Word tells us that Jesus lived and died and rose again. He took these sins we have talked about and forgave every last one!

Your love Father who has forgiven you wants you to know today: **God's Word Works. So Proclaim It!** What works? Not you. Not your eloquence. Not your life. Not your persuasiveness. God's Word works. It's the power that changes people's hearts and lives. So share it! Sow the seed boldly! Frequently! And when you do, expect that great things will happen. Trust that great growth in God's Kingdom can happen as the Word is proclaimed.

This week I had the privilege to go to our Seminary for a conference. What I learned is that one of best ways of proclaiming the Word in the world is to do so through refugees and internationals who are in America. They hear the good news of Jesus and have a desire to share the good news with their family and friends back in their home culture. This conference was to provide tools for people in such situations to help them proclaim the word. Peter Bur and I were there because of the work we do among the Sudanese.

What an uplifting conference this was! Peter gets it. A passion to proclaim the word of God, because he knows it works. The Hmong. I met a man named Isaac David, a refugee from Liberia in our PSI program who yearns to visit Liberia and share the Word that has brought him so much joy and peace. Dr. Jordan and Mr. Robinson are two men from Pakistan. They recently were evacuated from their home country because of the immediate danger to their lives for sharing the Gospel.

Ilyan in Bulgaria who has developed an extensive plan for reaching the Romani or gypsy culture in northwest Bulgaria... but not just there. He developed an extensive and cost effective strategic plan for bringing the gospel to gypsies living in Macedonia, Romania, Turkey, Sweden, and beyond.

There were 7 Hmong men there. We learned how the Hmong people are scattered among many countries. People who were persecuted and who continue to be looked down upon as second class citizens even in their home country. But they have a strong desire to share the gospel.

There were people of Hispanic culture. A WELS congregation called a second pastor. The first one is bilingual, and for the first time ever, the second pastor is also bilingual. They needed to be... they have 300 Hispanics on their prospect list. A heart to scatter the seed, trusting God to make it grow.

One thing that was the same among all of these people was this overwhelming desire to proclaim the good news. They know how the Word has worked in their lives. They know the hope they have knowing that

Listen: the Word you have received is the very same. The only difference is that many of you have enjoyed it working you your whole life. Perhaps the peace and joy of knowing God's love fore you in Christ Jesus is something you often take for granted. So here's is my challenge for you.

- 1) Remember the working power of God's Word in your own life.
- 2) Remember just how much other people need that same word working their lives.
- 3) Look for the opportunity to share Jesus with others. Now, I know it can be awkward dropping religion into most conversations, so instead I want you watch for and be alert to certain situations and trigger words. One pastor said it like this: Keep your ears pealed and eyes open for one of the three "nots." "I'm not from here." "Things are not going well." "I was not prepared for this."
 - a. **I'm not from here.** So this is what someone says when they're new, right? They just moved in next door. They just moved in at the next cubicle. A new student shows up at school. The checker lets you know they're new to the area. Start watching and listening for the new person. That's your cue to sow the seed and invite them to church. They are vulnerable and feel they don't belong. This is the perfect time to help them feel at home with Jesus. Invite to church. Share God's Word and promises. Sow the seed.
 - b. **Things are not going well.** This one may see as much as here. Someone looks troubled or upset. That's your cue to ask how they're doing. "Things are not going well." There's your not cue! This is the time to invite them to church and share with them the One who helps us with all our problems and needs.

By the way, as usual, I'm preaching this to myself too. We're doing this together... I'm not preaching at you, I'm preaching at us. Last week when I went to Gold's Gym at Aksarben, I was checking in at the counter. The woman had her back turned to the counter, and when she turned around, it was clear she had been crying. I immediately felt sorry for her and didn't want to embarrass her, so I pretended I didn't

notice the tears. She checked me in and I hurried to the gym. Later I felt so horrible that I missed that opportunity. There was no one in line behind me. I should have asked her what was wrong. There was opportunity to show the love of Jesus and perhaps it would have led to inviting her to church. Pastors don't always get this right either. So together, let's watch for this not. The person who says, or would say, "Things are not going well." Step in and invite or encourage with the Word of God. Sow the seed and trust God's powerful word will work. Or invite them to church so the seed can be sown.

- c. **I was not prepared for this.** So this is what people say when they're overwhelmed, right? You'll hear this if a person is stretched, if they feel like they're losing their grip, if they feel they're in over their heads. "I'm was not prepared for this." People say that when they have their first baby... or their second... or their sixth. They say that when they're just married... or just divorced. They say that when they start in a new school. Or a new job. Or a new position. They say this when they move. They say this when there is an accident, or a serious disease, or a death in the family.

When you hear those words or see someone who is clearly overwhelmed, that's your cue to step in and invite and to share the promises of God. "Hey, when I feel overwhelmed, I go to God and remember his promises. I get comfort at church. Will you come with me?"

Here they are again: "I'm not from here." "Things are not going well." "I was not prepared for this."

Friends, know it and believe it: God's word works. Proclaim it!!! Amen.