

Title: “The Kingdom”

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Mark 4:26-29

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Service Readings: Ezek. 17:22-24; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Mark 4:26-34

The kingdom of God is like a seed. We can take comfort in the knowledge that this kingdom will grow by the power of God, not by the work of man.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The boat was gently rocking but it didn't seem to bother Jesus, for he continued to teach as if he had been sitting on dry ground. Peter sat closest to him so that he could hear every word. He didn't want to miss a single one that came from his teacher's mouth. He didn't understand much of what he heard, but expected that this understanding would come in time. For now it was enough to absorb all that Jesus was speaking.

He sat in the boat, facing Jesus and with his back to the crowd. He had no need to glance behind for he could easily imagine the scene. The multitude had grown so large that it forced them into the boat in the first place and by the sounds he heard, it was only increasing in size. He tried to block all of that out and focus on his master. He wanted to understand; he *needed* to understand, and so he tried to ignore everything else.

Jesus' teachings were difficult for he seemed to turn everything upside down. And these parables? They only served to make the lessons that much more challenging to comprehend. What was he trying to tell them when he spoke about seeds falling on different soils? He had explained it to the disciples but Peter still didn't really understand. And now he was speaking again about seeds, but this time including a farmer and a mustard tree. He was saying:

“The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

³⁰ And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

What did this all mean? He knew that the return of God's kingdom was what Israel was waiting for. They expected it, prayed for it, and believed that once God returned he would restore them to promised glory. But that's not the image Jesus was portraying at all! He was saying that the kingdom of God was like something small that would grow on its own, without human intervention.

That didn't sound like a forceful takeover of all their enemies! So maybe Peter *didn't* know what the kingdom was, and maybe neither did Israel!

He took mental inventory of everything he had learned thus far and set his mind to trying to understand the message of Jesus: The kingdom of God has nothing to do with any geographic location or nation rule. It won't come in overwhelming force but will instead grow from something small. But from that small beginning, it will become a kingdom that will cover all the earth. And this growth? It will come from something outside man's efforts.

Peter knew a lot, but far from enough. He still had more questions and more confusion than answers and knowledge. But as Jesus would make his way to the cross, where he would suffer, die, and then rise again, Peter would continue to grasp a more comprehensive understanding of this kingdom that Jesus spoke of. And this understanding would fuel his confidence, especially in the face of opposition, rejection, and even suffering. For he would know that all his work would not be in vein, nor would expansion of this kingdom be placed upon the shoulders of him or those who came after.

This kingdom of God, like a mustard seed, started small and seemingly insignificant. It broke into the world through the birth of Jesus and from there grew: first to twelve, then outward to the four corners of the world. And with it a new era was ushered in, the era of God's grace and mercy. Through the suffering of Jesus, forgiveness of sins was made available to all and the gates of the kingdom were thrown open for all to enter. It mattered not if you were lowly or if you were poor. It mattered not the life you lived. All that mattered was your faith and trust in Jesus and the promise of salvation that he extended to you in your baptism.

And as a citizen of God's kingdom we now enjoy the benefits of that kingdom. Sure, we still feel the effects of this worldly kingdom, but we can live in confidence that it is only for a time, and when Jesus returns, we will experience the fullness of all he offers. But for now, we experience only hints and glances. But our gospel passage this morning reminds us that it is indeed real, that it is ruled by Jesus, and that we will experience it in full.

And this is a comforting reminder, indeed. Especially in a world that seems to be attacking the very creator and his kingdom with more and more rigor. The world seems to be evicting God from every place. Government institutions that once publicly recognized a creator, now deny it as fact. Schools are prohibited from speaking about Jesus and consequences come swiftly when his name is mentioned. Morals have degraded, truth has been replaced with individual ideologies, and the only God that is accepted one from the world: power or money or something else. And this is just here in the United States, where we have the freedom to worship! Around the world there are countries who still seek and persecute those who would believe in Jesus. These Christians gather in secret. They whisper for fear that they will be overheard and punished.

But we are comforted in today's passage. The kingdom is his, not ours. He created it; he expands it; he rules in it. We may get discouraged with the state of the world, and we may wonder how God's Kingdom can possibly survive with the way things are going, but we should remember that God will do his work to bring the seed that was planted to full maturity and bearing fruit, even though we don't see how that can possibly happen.

So take heart. Rest in the assurance that God's kingdom is here, even when it doesn't look like it, even when it seems like it may be overcome. It can't. It won't. This kingdom is ruled by Jesus and nothing can stop its expansion. One day it will be the only kingdom and one day we will be its citizens. And on that day, we'll celebrate and worship our one and only king.

Please pray with me.

We thank you for your wisdom and for the teachings of Jesus Christ. We pray that we can be like Peter, eager to learn and understand your message. Help us to see the kingdom of God at work in our lives, even in the small things. May we be patient and allow your kingdom to grow in us and in the world.

Amen.