

“The Promise of God’s Kingdom”

Salado UMC—17 June 2018: Fourth after Pentecost— Father’s Day

Preaching Text: Mark 4:26-34—Year B

Salado, Texas 76571

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**“There are two cardinal sins from which all others spring:
Impatience and Laziness” — Franz Kafka (1883—1924).**

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Hear the day’s Lesson:

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

30 He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 yet 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.”

33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34 he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples (Mark 4:26-34).

If there is one thing that most of us do not have—it is patience. We want what we want and we want it now! Perhaps this impatience is a feature of modern life. We are people who get uneasy when waiting for an appointment, for the internet to load, and for our microwaves to perform faster. Everything we do is sped up and some people are undone by the slightest delay in have their request or desire granted at Nano-speed. We all share this general anxiety. We suffer from it too.

I visited a hospital several years ago. At the information desk volunteers were changing shifts. I asked about a patient’s room number, but they could not locate the patient. Then three volunteers began debating where I might find the patient, each with a differing opinion. Because of some construction, the information station was pretty congested. I was drawing quite a crowd and quite a few hospital employees also chimed in. Suddenly there were six or seven people locked in a debate concerning my question. I waited. Finally, I ducked out of the debate. As I looked back over my shoulder, I noticed that no one had noticed my departure. The argument raged on nonetheless. I confess that I simply did not have the patience to wait out the debate.

Soren Kierkegaard called this restlessness that we human creatures suffer under “the state of anxiety.” Kierkegaard also wrote that anxiety was the precondition of sin, being the theologian/philosopher, he was. Hear Kierkegaard’s view of anxiety:

Deep within every human being there still lives the anxiety over the possibility of being alone in the world, forgotten by God, overlooked among the millions and millions in this enormous household.

One keeps this anxiety at a distance by looking at the many round about who are related to him as kin and friends, but the anxiety is still there, nevertheless, and one hardly dares think of how he would feel if all this were taken away.

If all this seems a little too “heady” for you, then Kierkegaard writes in another place more plainly: “Anxiety” is actually nothing but impatience.” Patience/impatience is what Mark’s parable addresses in part. The Bible addresses the issue of patience. Paul writes to Galatia that, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things” (Galatians 5:22-23). In Colossians we read: “Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Colossians 3:12). Hebrews also speaks of a “patience [that] inherits the promises” (Hebrews 6:11-12).

Yet for Bible’s steady caution for patience, we come to our impatience honestly. Modern life teaches us impatience. The life depicted around us spurs us to greater and greater degrees of impatience. Movies constantly show us faster cars and faster and more beautiful people. TV shows us legal trials in 60 minutes which take eighteen months in real life. Novels pack decades of action in 300 to 500 pages. Yet, we digest these “page turners” in a few days. If honest, in our sane moments, we know that reality is not like the movies or television. Faster images and quicker pace—this is the modern game. This is why we need the gospel desperately. What our world dishes up to us as truth is really a lie dressed to kill.

I suggest we consider the parable of the “seed growing secretly.” We could call it “The Parable of the Miraculous Mundane.” Mundane or routine, every day, dreary, commonplace, boring, unexciting, humdrum, monotonous, tedious, uninteresting, dull, or ordinary—you get the idea. These words all carry pejorative meanings. We usually avoid what these words represent at all costs.

These parables, some of the very few in Mark, remind us how God’s kingdom reveals itself. Jesus uses common images to describe indescribable things. God’s kingdom—how do we explain that in a children’s sermon? Originally, the parable spoke about God’s judgment which comes like the harvest. After the sower scatters the seed it grows and matures. How it grows the farmer does not know. The farmer knows a mysterious mix of soil and moisture eventually create growth. The plants develop—“first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.” In time, the harvest comes. Mark relates God’s fulfilling God’s creative purpose at judgment (*Yom Yahweh*).

For us, however, the parable addresses daily life. Our culture declares life is “fast and furious.” But wise people know that life routinely comes in slow and steady ways. The best relationships often take years or decades to develop. The best marriages often move toward rightness in fits and spurts. These marriages do not begin at the apex of love and soar. Rather, marriage spirals toward fulfillment—sometimes trouble-free and lovely. Yet, at times, marriage is hard work and often stormy. Fatherhood is similar.

The parable's good news is "be not anxious" because your life does not look exciting every day of every week of every year. If life feels routine, every day, boring, commonplace, unexciting, humdrum, dreary, monotonous, tedious, uninteresting, dull, or ordinary, then . . . welcome to the human race. This parable reminds us that life—especially a Christian life of discipleship is like seed growing. It is slow, but it is steady. It is the miracle of the mundane. If you are feeling a little mundane, then you are right on schedule to receive the kingdom of God.

A decade ago, my friend of thirty-five years, Rev. Jay Darnell, celebrated his 92nd birthday on August 10. Jay was always like a second father to me. Each Father's Day he naturally comes to mind. He and I had observed his birthday on August 11, but he eventually told me that he looked it up and his birthday. It is actually on the 10th. Clearly, he was not anxious about birthdays. Regardless, Jay knew a thing or two about the pastoral ministry.

Many things make us anxious and the pastoral ministry is no exception. For ministers, many worry about whether or not their church, their District Superintendent, or their Bishop recognize their hard work/talent. This circumstance creates impatience about where church appoints them and how quickly they climb the ecclesial food chain. Jay told young preachers that there is no need to worry about where the Bishop will put you. There is no need to be impatient. All preachers need to remember is three things—everything else will take care of itself. The three things:

- 1. Stay close to Jesus.**
- 2. Love your people.**
- 3. Do your job.**

I bring all this up just in case you are anxious about your life. What Jay tells young preachers is sound counsel for all who consider themselves disciples of Jesus Christ. Jay's advice sounds suspiciously like Jesus when he told the people in the Sermon on the Mount: "Strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). Amen.

David N. Mosser, Salado UMC, Salado, Texas 76571