
²⁶ And he said, "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." 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 without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything. (ESV)

"Umbrella Faith"

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus who is the Christ. Amen

One summer, a drought threatened the crop in a small town. On a hot and dry Sunday, the village parson told his congregation, "There isn't anything that will save us except to pray for rain. Go home, pray, believe, and come back next Sunday ready to thank God for sending rain."

The people did as they were told and returned to church the following Sunday. But as soon as the parson saw them, he was

furious. "We can't worship today. You do not yet believe," he said. "But," they protested, "we prayed, and we do believe." "Believe?" he responded. "Then where are your umbrellas?" "Where are your umbrellas?"

The pastor was reminding the people that their faith needed to be seen in some action. "Where are your umbrellas". Our Gospel lesson this morning speaks about that kind of faith and trust in God. Umbrella faith. Jesus is speaking about the kingdom of God and how that kingdom grows. It grows with faith, an unwavering faith, a faith that we cannot see or understand. The first parable in our Gospel lesson this morning deals with the kingdom of God in a way that you and I in this area can understand. Jesus tells a story about a farmer, any farmer, who goes out to plant his seeds into the ground. Then instead of worrying about the seeds, lets nature take its course, and the seeds grow first the blade, then the ear then the full grain in the ear.

Then the farmer goes out and harvests the fruit of the harvest. The words in the text of sleep and rise, night and day means the man didn't do anything to the seed, but trusted in the natural order of things for he knew he could do nothing to help the seed grow.

We can understand that. No matter how much we worry about the crop, how come we pace the floor, how much we complain about the wet weather, or the dry weather, in the end we cannot do anything. We must let the natural order of things be done. Sometimes it is very difficult for us to surrender to the natural order. Sometimes we cannot let go, sometimes we get so caught up in trying to help the natural order that life become miserable for us. We become a grouch and others tend to avoid us. If we do our job of planting the seed right, the seed will do its job and eventually the harvest will be there.

Jesus is comparing the kingdom of God to this idea of a natural order in the growing of crops and the harvest.

He is saying that just as we need to surrender to the natural order in growing crops, in the kingdom of God we need to surrender to the reign or rule of God in his kingdom. The kingdom of God for Jesus was not a place on this earth, it was not a kingdom. The kingdom of God is God's rule, is God's reign on this earth. Jesus is saying that God's rules his kingdom, God's reigns not us.

The kingdom of God comes of itself. We don't bring God's kingdom, he does. We don't rule, he does.

Martin Luther says: "The kingdom of God comes of itself" and our prayer, "Thy Kingdom come" is that it may come to us. It is almost blasphemous to ask people to help God to build his kingdom.

We must acknowledge "Thine is, the kingdom" and build upon that solid fact. The kingdom of God is not the product of human effort. God brings his plan to fruition in his own way and needs no help from us.

Our activity becomes constructive only when we allow him to take full charge.

What you and I are called to have is faith, faith that God is the ruler of his kingdom, faith that God is working even when we cannot see him, even when we have lost sight of him, even when we see no answer from him, we must believe that he is still ruling, he is still in charge.

Umbrella faith. Faith that believes God is in control.

A pastor tells this story: A young woman in our parish was going through a serious crisis in her life. It was extremely difficult for her to do what she had to do, and I assured her that God would help her through her time of trial and instantly she retorted almost in a sneer: "Look Pastor, you know I've been a good church member, but the first time I really need God he's

nowhere around. I've prayed and I got no answer. I asked for help, nothing. Then I knew what I'm going to do, I'm going to have to do by myself. In all of this, I don't even know whether God exists or not. I've searched, but I can't find him."

Many of us can tell the same the story or something similar. Many of us have at times wondered if God is really real. We wonder if he is active in his kingdom, whether he is working or just leaving us to our own ends. It is many times in these dark hours that we come to a vital, lasting relationship with God. When we thought we had lost him in the pain and frustration of life, it is in those very kinds of circumstances that we end up finding God.

In his book, Out of the Whirlwind, Mark Tabb writes, "He tells us to trust him enough to believe he knows what he is doing. When his actions don't make sense, trust him. When the windows of heaven seem to be open extra wide and life can't get any better, trust him. When the bottom falls out and life turns hard, trust him. Good times and bad, happy and sad, trust him. When I try to explain him away or reduce him to neat little formulas, I show a lack of faith not a wealth of it."

What will God do? I have no idea, but I do know this: God isn't making things up on the fly. He knows what he is doing. Now

I must trust him enough to entrust my life to him even when I would rather not."

Umbrella faith!

In the second parable Jesus tells us that God's kingdom will grow like a mustard seed.

He says: 31* It is like a grain of 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."

The kingdom of God is like a small seed planted in the earth. It will grow and grow till it becomes the largest of all shrubs. Jesus is saying though God's kingdom started out small with just 12 disciples, it will grow and become very large. God's rule on this earth began small but will grow.

We must have umbrella faith!

We must have faith that God is working in His kingdom.

It is like the safety net in the following:

When the Golden Gate bridge was being built in San Francisco, a number of workers lost their lives by falling from precariously high positions. As a result, the work proceeded slowly until someone hit on the idea of building a net under the

construction area so that when a workman fell, he would not fall to his death but would be caught by the net.

A giant safety net was developed—at a cost of \$100,000. This was the first time something like this was used at a construction site. With the security of the net below them, men were able to move about at a faster pace because they knew that if they fell their lives would be spared. With the security of the net below them, they could work without the dread of uncertainty.

We may not be able to see the net below us, but it's there. Our security comes from a loving, all-powerful God who protects us every step of the way.

God is working in His kingdom. We have a sense of security in this life that God is alive and well.

The kingdom of God is like a seed planted in the ground it grows of it's own accord. The kingdom of God is having umbrella faith that God is alive and well.

This closing story about a Grandma and gardening, I think, sums it all up. A young lady writes:

I watched my grandma hoe the clay soil in my garden. "Don't see how you grow anything in this," she mused.

"Colorado soil can't compare to yours in Iowa, Grandma!" I stared at her in awe, capturing the moment in my memory forever. Wisps of her silvery hair sneaked from beneath her headscarf as her thin torso bent down to pull a fistful of bindweed.

"This stuff will grow anywhere," she laughed. "Even in this soil!"

Although she lived alone on the Iowa farm she and Grandpa had settled a half century ago, she still maintained a garden that could sustain most of Benton County! Some of my favorite summer childhood days had been spent in her garden helping her pull up plants she identified as weeds, or planting vegetables and flowers.

She had taught me that gardening wasn't only about cultivating plants, it was about cultivating faith. Each seed planted was proof of that. When I was seven I asked, "Grandma, how do the seeds know to grow the roots down and the green part up?"

"Faith," was her answer.

When I grew up and married, my husband recognized the impression Grandma's dirt left under my fingernails and in my heart. He supported my dream to live outside the city. Our two-acre plot had a horse, dog, cat, rabbit, six hens and, of course, a

large garden. I was privileged and overjoyed to have Grandma working in it.

Grandma leaned the hoe next to a fence post and walked to my flower bed to help me plant the daisies she'd brought from her garden to mine. She didn't know I was watching as she patted the dirt around the base of a plant.

Waving her hand in the sign of a cross above it, she whispered, "God bless you, grow."

I'd almost forgotten that garden blessing from my youth.

Ten years later, those daisies still flourish.

Grandma is tending God's garden now but still influences me daily. Whenever I tuck a seedling into the earth, I trace a small cross above it in the air and say, "God bless you, grow."

And in quiet times, I can still hear her blessing, nurturing my faith. "God bless you, grow."

Amen