

26 He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. **27** Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. **28** All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. **29** As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

30 Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? **31** It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. **32** Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

33 With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. **34** He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

All by Itself

Last Friday and Saturday, part of work day, rushed around trying to get the drip system caught up with the rest of the plants that have been added. After setting up the sprinkler system and programming the timer, all I had to do was sit, wait, and watch whether or not the timer was working. Once that was all said and done it didn't matter if I paid attention or not - the timer was set and the plants were watered automatically, without any care or concern on my part. Which was great especially when water was out of my control while away at convention.

In a similar way that's what the kingdom of God or the reign of God is like. The means God uses don't look like much. The drip tubing doesn't look like much and the timer is questionable but the seed still sprouts, growth still happens even when the workers sleep. It's automatic, all by itself... it happens without our doing. The will of our Father is always accomplished. His rule, his word may not look like much, it's unimpressive and often the plants appears to be dead. Regardless, it's the water, the word we need for growth.

Because of this we may overemphasize certain aspects in the kingdom - making growth depend either on the gardener or the methods used to garden. In life that may be seen as one who refuses to allow anyone to help because then it would be out of their control. Jesus doesn't want us thinking, “His Kingdom depends on me!” God wants us assured that his kingdom is out of our control but it is also in capable hands. Now that we are well rested (two weeks ago), well fed having foraged through our parent's pantry (last week), we enjoy growth as God grows his kingdom.

Last week Jesus' family didn't think to highly of him. He was out of his mind. The Pharisees agreed, “He's possessed by a demon.” We're only four chapters into the book of Mark and Jesus is off to a rocky start. He's confronted by the religious leaders, he's breaking the Sabbath laws by healing on

the Sabbath. His kingdom, his following, his reign just doesn't look that great. His disciples may already be questioning, "Is Jesus really worth following?"

That's when Jesus teaches them what he is all about. This is what the kingdom of God is all about. (this isn't about us or what we do... we don't rule God's kingdom but we are certainly a part of it) When we hear those words, "Kingdom of God," we may be thinking of something static. This is the rule of God. His reign. What does his reign, his rule, his kingdom look like in this world? He is the sower who indiscriminately sows seed. He's foolishly casting seed on the highways and byways, among the rocks, and thorns. Jesus is generous with his Word.

The rule, the reign of God *is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth.*³² *Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.*" Jesus leads us back to the Isaiah 55:10,11 where it is written that God automatically water the earth with his Word - *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish... so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.* Mark reminds us, "This isn't a reign or a rule you can see. It's small. It's not something you can control, *"The wind blows where it wishes,"* and so does God's Spirit (John 3:8). You can't control God's kingdom it starts with a seed, his Word, and that seed brings life. He is the sower of said seed and he is the one who grows said seed and he describes that process as, "automatic." *"All by itself."*

So does that mean we have nothing to do? No, we do plenty alright. What we often do is get in the way. We may not say, "Jesus is out of his mind." or possessed by a demon but we often don't think much of his reign. To be honest we don't often think much of his word either. How often haven't we gone in search for a magic bullet to solve all of our problems? If only we had newer music, a bigger sanctuary, more evangelism programs - then we could see some growth. Then we worry, wandering around the garden wringing our hands over seeds and what we can do to make them grow. If we could only do it right, perfectly, then then we wouldn't have problems. This makes us afraid of letting others be in control.

Others are more than willing to give up and walk away - place our problems in another's hands because we feel insufficient to deal with the task at hand. One pastor confided at conference, "The church can't move forward with me as the pastor. I come to these events. I see what others are doing. I can't do that. If they're going to grow... they need someone else." In some ways conventions can be depressing because they always show us something else that we could and probably should be doing. Then when we do these things, whatever they may be we are busy looking for immediate results. We look for increases in attendance or the bottom line. We want - what God has not promised. We want to base our life, our faith on results, something tangible, solid. We often look to our health, wealth, or

happiness for assurance that God loves me and all is well in his kingdom. But if we were to see such growth - wouldn't we become pompous and proud?

The sad part is that what he has promised we haven't believed. He's promised his Word, his seed is at work even when we aren't working or doing. That growth can't be measured and often isn't even visible. So when it comes to growing the church - we may not "grow" visibly. We may remain a small congregation. But that doesn't mean there isn't growth. That doesn't mean we've failed. That doesn't mean God has given up his reign.

That kingdom grows even when we are asleep or working in the field. That growth comes not because of the worker but because of the seed. God's Word is powerful. Powerful enough to take awful, no good sinners like you and me who are doomed to hell and makes us heirs of this kingdom. So when it comes to measuring growth here in our church we let God take care of the results. He guarantees growth. He doesn't want us to measure growth in the kingdom of God by tracking results or looking to numbers and blessings but rather he wants us assured - his kingdom is growing even among us.

Look at how the church has grown since that first seed was cast into the ground. The church looked so small. The reign, the rule of God didn't even extend beyond Jerusalem. Although God, Jesus became small, he entered this world as a child, he became small enough to live under the law and keep it perfectly. He became small enough to die a shameful death and be buried in a borrowed tomb. Like that mustard seed, He rested in the ground. When Jesus left the grave that seed sprouted ²⁸ *All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.*

Something very small, Christianity, took root in the hostile ground of Jerusalem and the Roman Empire. The religious leaders hoped it would if they didn't water it. Rome did everything to stamp out the weed that had worked its way into their garden. But it just kept growing. Jesus doesn't compare his kingdom to the cedars of Lebanon but the mustards of Jerusalem. It's a mustard seed - It grows. It's like a star thistle or morning glory. You can't easily get rid of it. The seeds aren't easily confined. They spread quickly by the wind and even in the stomachs of birds.

That message was carried on the wind. Jesus died to save sinners. He came to bring shelter to all the birds of the field. He came set up the system and continues to bring growth. Jesus doesn't make us slaves again to fear. We don't have to question if we've done enough or been faithful enough. We know the answer. We haven't but we have one who has.

No we're not in control of God's reign or rule in this world. His rule doesn't look like much but in it we find shelter. We can find shelter in his shade. Where he prepares a table in the presence of our enemies, his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Just a splash of water with his word he

reminds us *“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,”* Titus 3:4-5 No it doesn't look like much just a little mustard seed that doesn't appear to do any good - and through these things, his Word, his sacrament, his promise, look what he accomplishes - Growth! That works without our doing. Every week you hear God's Word

Something so small. Something so insignificant has taken root in our inhospitable and hostile hearts. That is what has led us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior from sin. God encourages to run with it.

God will bring about God's reign. It's not up to us. We can't make it happen nor can we stop it. God will grow it. That is his promise. Like an out of control weed that spreads and can't be contained. We can't measure the strength or truth of God's promises based on our efforts. It's automatic.

Just like the timer which waters the plants out back - God's word continues to bring life to our hearts and lives. It's out of our control and yet always growing. Wherever his Word is found there is the water of life, the seed that looks so small and yet produces an abundant harvest. That reign is growing among you and through you as the seed sticks and brings much fruit. We find that growth even among us. Amen.