

## What Boundaries?

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year B: Pentecost 5: Mark 4:26-34

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

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

<sup>33</sup>With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; <sup>34</sup>he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

*The reign of God moves and grows on its own without any assistance from us. It gets into everything! Praise God!*

Mark's parables about the seed that grows and the mustard seed are seedy indeed! In ancient Israel, no one wanted to grow mustard. It was the plant that grew insidiously everywhere it ought not be growing. This was a prolific plant. We're tending our yards and gardens right now. Think dandelions, think thistle, think creeping jenny. Now, think those creeping long ivy like weeds that once they start, you can hardly spray enough Round-up to ever kill them. That's mustard seed! Ha!

Now hear it again! God's kingdom is like a mustard seed.....growing here and then there and popping up over there. "Oh dang, now it's on this side of the lawn. Didn't I just spray that yesterday?" Yes!

Mustard seed got into all the wrong places. And because no one planted it, it simply did it's own thing...growing and growing and growing...on its own.

Today is Father's Day. Where would we be without our Dads? Be they birth fathers, step-fathers, substitute fathers, or great father figures...where would we be without our Dads? They have molded and shaped us, loved us and given us legacies to live by. I'm guessing that every Dad has been apart from a child for a day's trip and come home thinking...how did he grow so much while I was gone?

That is the main idea of this parable. From small to large, insignificant to great, private to public. A pastor asked the parish nurse to find out what families had members serving in the military and put those names on the prayer list. That was it. Just put their names on the prayers. Pretty soon, a retired colonel caught wind of it and called a meeting with the parish nurse and the pastor. Next thing you know, there is a committee and a budget and programs. Vets are being served. People are praying. Whew! God wanted that to take off. Couldn't keep it contained.

Jesus says, "This farmer plants seeds." He toils a long day getting the field planted. Then he eats dinner and goes to bed. The next day he goes out to look at the field. Nothing yet. Same next day and the next and the next. But one morning after nights of sleeping, there is a tiny green haze over the dark earth. Sprouts! Then stalks. Then the head of the grain. Finally after all of that, time to harvest.

Jesus said, the man did nothing to make the seed grow. All the farmer did was sleep each night. On its own, that seed watered by God's rain and warmed by God's sun, grew up. So it is the with the spread of the Gospel, and God's will and reign all over the earth. God will have it grow on its own. In God's time. At God's will. Mysteriously.

At one level, this parable lets us off the hook for what we don't have to do! We don't have to have degrees in botany or physics. We don't have to own tractors or grain bins. Isn't that a relief? There are times when we all struggle, that we haven't done enough. I could have helped one more. We should have fed another family. How come we can't stop war or poverty or hunger?

We don't make all those things happen. The parable says we make none of it happen. The seed grows while the farmer is sleeping. It grows. God makes it grow. Take heart! Relax! God will grow God's reign over all things in God's own time.

On the other hand...many, many of us have uttered prayers for the most challenging of circumstances. Day and night we pray for the restoration of a relationship, or the healing of a wound, or that thing that makes us wring our hands. Then one day, years after we thought God had forgotten to hear our prayers, the resolution comes. The health returns. We learn why it took all that time for 'harvest' to happen. And then we thank God for God's wisdom and ask

forgiveness for our impatience. There is something to be said for repeated faithful actions, over and over again.

The reign of God will not remain secretive forever, nor does its ultimate emergence depend on humanity's ingenuity, social engineering, pietistic intensity, moral virtue, or spiritual cleverness.

The reign of God will mess with established boundaries and conventional values. Like a fast-replicating plant, it will get into everything. It will bring life and color to desolate places. It will crowd out other concerns. It will resist our manipulations. Its humble appearance will expose and mock pride and pretentiousness like a good burlesque show.

You and I might like things to stay in their place. We like structure and clear boundaries. God's will doesn't care about established boundaries. If God wants to work God's way into a lawyer's life or a prostitute's life, so be it. If God wishes to be preached from the largest pulpits to thousands of people and to people who have never heard of Jesus in the deepest of jungles, God will make it happen. If God wants Muslims, Mormons and Methodists and Hindus and Buddhists and agnostics to believe in God, it will happen! Like the plant that works its way through a tiny crack in the pavement, only needing one spec of dirt and one seed...God's reign can grow and grow and grow. There is nothing we can do to stop it!

Which might be the best news of all. The Church began with only one man, only one baby in fact, Jesus Christ. But it has grown to nations and peoples literally all over the world.

William Barclay tells this story.<sup>i</sup> A new church was being built. There would be a huge stained glass window. A committee decided the theme of the window would be thousands of children standing around the throne of God. The contracted artist painted the picture and loved it.

During his sleep, he seemed to hear a noise in the studio. A stranger was standing there with a brush working at the artist's picture. "Stop!" he cried. "You're going to ruin it."

"I think," said the stranger, "that you have ruined it already."

"How is that?" said the artist.

“Well, you have many colors of paint to choose from but you have only used one for the faces of the children. Who told you there were only children gathered around the heavenly throne whose faces were white? Look! I have painted some of their faces brown, black, the colors of every race. They have all answered my call.”

“Your call? Who are you?”

“Once long ago I said let the little children come to me and do not stop them for to such of these belongs the Kingdom of heaven.” And then the Master vanished from sight.

In the morning the artist awoke. His picture was just the same. So it had only been a vision and a dream. Although the committee was coming that very day to see the finished product, he grabbed his brushes and paints and began to paint the children of every color and of every race throughout all the world. When the committee arrived they thought the picture was beautiful. One whispered, “why, it's God's family at home.”

There are no boundaries for God. Only more fields to grow in. Thanks be to God!  
Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> William Barclay. The Gospel of Mark. Westminster Press. Philadelphia, PA. 1954. Pg 109-110,