

Second Sunday after Pentecost

THE KINGDOM COME

Mark 4:26-34

Second Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 6)

Analysis by Norb Kabelitz and Kris Wright

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.

Note: This Markan pericope has appeared in 1991, 1994, 1997 on Pentecost 4 suggesting a three year cycle, but it did not appear in 2000, or 2003 perhaps because of the revised rubric for its use is on the Sunday between June 12 and 18 inclusive if after Trinity Sunday). No doubt the timing of Easter influences the date. The only previous "Crossing" appears in 1997 by Ed Schroeder on the web site. There are clear thematic connections between the Cedar tree allegory of Ezekiel 17 and the Gospel

reading, the two kingdom parables of planting and growth, the spontaneity of the sown seed and small beginnings becoming a large nesting place and shade.

DIAGNOSIS: MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE KINGDOM

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *The Messiah King as "Miracle Man"*

Ed has coined the phrase "God's mercy-management regime" for Kingdom of God. However, the disciples up to this point have been introduced to messianic miracles they see as an exercise in pure power over disease, disability, demons and Sabbath rules rather than a ministry of mercy. While Jesus may have "explained everything" when he begins the kingdom parables, they seem to see them through a glory lens and are blindsided so that the "secret" of the parables remain hidden. Note that after all the "explanations" the disciples will be arguing about which of them will be the greatest in the kingdom," and some will put in first dibs about who will sit at Jesus' right or left—places of honor in the Kingdom, (Mark 9:33 and 10:35-41).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Led into Misbelief*

Misbelief envisions the Messiah as some kind of divine superman who will make things right by force with divine power rather than by mercy. Instead there is the expectation to believe in Jesus as the "powerful Son of David" who will rule over rather than serve under. With this misbelief it is impossible to understand the Kingdom of God as an agricultural ministry that works organically and secretly from "underneath" not from "top down." Misbelief leads to a desire for a King like David who destroys enemies top down, and rewards collaborators by royal decree (see Mark 10:41-45).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Missing out on the Kingdom of Mercy*

Misbelief leads to overconfidence in our own efforts to both promote and build the kingdom by hierarchical means, by power and force, not by a Gospel of repentance (mind and heart change) born of the Gospel proclamation, “the Kingdom of God has come near.” We miss who Jesus is-in all his mercy, and hear only the King’s word of dismissal, “Depart from me, I never knew you?”

PROGNOSIS: THE KINGDOM REVEALED OUT OF THE GROUND

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Seed Holds a Saving Secret*

Look up “seed” in your concordance, especially the reference to John 12:24-26: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit. Those who love their life will lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” Old stuff, maybe. Used before, definitely. But use it now! God plants His only Son in the soil of our lives that He would bear fruit for the world. He came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). God sows His Son as “seed.” (“Now the Green Blade rises from the Buried Grain,” Lutheran Book of Worship, hymn #148). Such determined seed will no doubt burst forth with new life, creating shelter for all.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Faith Connects to the Seed of Promise*

Luther said, “After I have preached the Gospel I can rest assured that even while I drink my stein of beer from my Katie’s kitchen, God’s seed does its work without my forcing it. The “silent, inevitable growth” is not our work, but God’s. It proceeds without a lot of fanfare or force, as is sometimes suggested by appeals as, “Brother, Sister, are you saved?!”

(Witness the great missionary expansion of the 19th century that took place in spite of attacks on the Scriptures critics and scholars who claimed to have discovered evidence that refuted its authority.) The kingdom is not a “cause” for which we fight or build, it is what God does when we preach the Gospel in its truth and purity. The Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel (see Luther’s commentary on the Second Petition to the Lord’s Prayer, The Small Catechism). The Kingdom comes without our prayer, but we pray, “come to us also!” The seed carries its future in its own bosom.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Thine Is the Kingdom.*

The Kingdom is God’s and promotes a “regime of mercy management.” But as we nest in the kingdom’s branches, we become sowers of the “seed” (Christ and him crucified). The sowers themselves become signs of the Kingdom. The seeds germinate in the soils into which they have been sown, and we don’t know how it grows. But God does. Though God’s Kingdom seems so organic and unroyal, one Son is seed who falls into the ground and rises anew to become sacred, safe nesting place for us all. Spread the word!