**Mark 4:26-32** June 17, 2018

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Pentecost 4

*Mark 4:26 [Jesus] said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 28All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. 29As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”*

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

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Is it enough? Really?**

It happens maybe every six months or so that my wife calls on her way back from work, coming back on Joe Prather from I-65. Now there are a couple things you have to know before I tell you what her phone call is about. First, you all know that there are dead zones for cell coverage on that highway. So, if you break down in just the wrong place, even having a cell phone isn’t going to do you any good. And the second thing you have to know is that she sometimes has to drive a vehicle from the mid-90s. It is a vehicle old enough that there is no buzzer or beeper to tell you when the fuel goes low. There isn’t even a warning light. You just had better pay attention to the gas gauge—*every time you get in the car!* And she just about always does, but about once in six months I get this phone call: “Hi, I should have checked the gas, but didn’t till I was part way home, and I’m not sure if I have enough gas to get home. If I’m not home in 20 minutes, could you get in the car and bring the gas can with you?”

It’s nerve wracking, isn’t it? When you don’t know if you have enough gas to get to the next station? Or… when you don’t know if you have enough money to make it to the end of the month? Or… when you worry if the roof is going to hold up till next year when you will hopefully have a little more money. Is it enough? Really?

It wracks your nerves. You shut off the AC and the radio hoping to save a few drops of fuel. Or you wake up in the middle of the night in the middle of a rain storm, listening to the drip…drip…drip. Or you count every penny and watch everything you do, to be sure nothing is wasted. Is it enough?

The thought often crossed the minds of Jesus’ disciples when they saw how Jesus did ministry. There was a time when they saw someone else performing miracles in Jesus’ name and people were flocking to him. Jesus disciples were all worried that their cause would get confused and split up; that this guy was going to relegate their band of Twelve to yesterday’s cause. “Make him stop Jesus” they said, “otherwise there won’t be enough.” Jesus said, “He is using my name. There will be enough.” (Mark 9:38-41)

One time after Jesus had died and risen from the dead, his disciples said, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?” Never mind that Jesus had just died on a cross and risen from the dead.—risen from the dead, mind you! “It’s not enough Jesus. We need more than talk about forgiveness and heaven and fluffy clouds and all that. We need power and thrones and armies and victories.”

God’s Old Testament prophets often asked it: Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and a bunch more too. These faithful prophets spoke the word of God, the *very word of God*. The people shrugged their shoulders, turned around and went their own way. The prophets asked God, “Is it enough? Really? No one is listening. We need more than that!”

We look at the news headlines and popular opinion and we ask, “Is it enough, Lord? Is it enough just to speak your word? All I hear is an empty echo. People hate you. And the rest just don’t care!” We look at the church attendance, the treasurer’s report, and sometimes we wonder, “Lord, is it enough? It seems like we are just about out of gas.”

Jesus’ words today are his answer to that concern. So what is Jesus going to say? Is he going to tell us, “Don’t worry! Hakuna matata! It’ll just go away. You are imagining things.” Is that what he would say?

Sometimes, our worries about God’s kingdom deserve God’s rebuke, like that time Jesus turned with fire in his eyes toward his disciple Peter and said, “Get out of my sight, Satan.” Sometimes that is what our untrusting worries deserve, for they are sin. When your concerns, my concerns become worry, we prove ourselves faithless children of God.

But also think about this: Should we not mourn a world where more and more people reject Christ every day? Should we not be concerned about human suffering now, and also about the much greater human suffering people will suffer in the hereafter? Should we not feel deeply about these things?

How can we go on, casually saying, “Well, it must be God’s will” when people reject Christ. No. We ought to be concerned. Jesus was concerned when he looked at a rich young man who loved his wealth too much, when he looked at the city of Jerusalem which would crucify him, as he sent his disciples out into the world with a message of forgiveness through God’s undeserved gift of a Savior. Jesus was concerned. But he never asked that doubting question, “Is it enough?”

So let us remember Christ’s concern for the lost, even as he tells us a parable to not worry about the power of God’s word. ***“This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”***

Is it enough to speak the word of God? “Yes,” Jesus says. “Yes it is. More than you know.”

A pastor was rooming with me up at the District Convention in Milwaukee this past week. He is retiring one week from today after 43 years of service. One time early in his ministry, back in the 70s in Washington state, how he stopped at a house. The wife was not particularly interested in the Lutheran Church, but her husband had been a WELS Lutheran many years ago. “But he is down in Arizona burying his father,” she said. “When he gets back I will tell him that you stopped by.” This pastor expected that to be little more than a courteous dismissal. Several days later he got a call from that man: “Pastor, please come to visit my house, today.” When the pastor arrived the other man told him, “Pastor, if you had stopped by my house two weeks ago, I would have told you to get lost. But when I was there putting my father into the ground I remembered what my pastor had taught us years ago back in catechism class. And when I got back and my wife told me you stopped by, I had to call you.” ***“A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.”***

Is there someone in your life who brushes you off when you talk about your Savior? Someone who seems unresponsive? Trust God to work. Speak the word and then let the word of God work like dripping water on a heart of stone. And if it doesn’t, that is God’s issue, not yours.

You know that in the Reformation, Martin Luther was the spark that lit the fires of reform and return to the word of God. He preached freedom, not worldly freedom, but spiritual freedom to worship God free from man-made rules and laws. He stood before councils and kings boldly defying them with the Word of God. Yet he freely admitted, *“I simply taught, preached, wrote God’s Word: otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my [friend] Philip… the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing: the Word did it all.”* (Luther’s Works, Vol. LI, p. 77) ***“A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.”***

A man who grew up in a home without God was received as a member into our congregation last year. He has since received orders to move on. Wouldn’t you or I love to take credit for bringing someone to Christ who had never been a Christian? Maybe your friendliness as a congregation, maybe one particular sermon of mine or another? But if you ever had a chance to listen to his testimony, he couldn’t point to any one person or time that brought him to trust in Jesus as his Savior. Sure, some loomed larger than others, but he could credit no one with the magical word that created faith. Just the Spirit’s testimony through different people at different times. ***“A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.”***

And you, who is there in your life who needs to hear the word. Don’t pretend that you can guess who will believe and who will not! That is sheer arrogance! That is God’s work, not yours. Do you have such a sure view of things that you think that you know the results of what you say fifty years down the road? Why, you don’t even know what tomorrow’s weather will be like. Do you really think that you can guess the outcome of speaking God’s Word to someone? Did not Jesus tell Nicodemus in a reading a few weeks ago, *“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”* (John 3:8).

But here is the one thing. For his own holy and wise reasons, God has been pleased to limit himself to the Word of God. And this means that for the plant of faith to grow in someone’s heart, the seed, the Word of God, needs to be planted. If you don’t talk about Jesus, if you don’t convey the message of human sin and Jesus’ salvation, then there is no way, no hope, that there can be faith in that person’s heart. Speak the word! Speak it! Once it is let loose, it has great power. It is what saves. Not you, not me. And it bears fruit that we cannot guess.

So stop your sins of worry. Trust the word. Stop your sins of hiding the word. Speak it. And take all those sins to this powerful truth behind all of the message: It is forgiven, forgiven in Jesus.

Is it enough? We worry for our church. Will the doors stay open? Is it enough to speak God’s word? Shouldn’t we put a muzzle on teachings and practices that offend people? Wouldn’t we get more people in if we talked less about sin and more about prosperity? Don’t we need signs, miracles, speaking in tongues?

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God’s Word is enough. Have the guts to say so. Amen.