

Sermon for June 24, 2012 – 4th Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 4:26-29

Theme: **God's evangelism strategy for you: Be a farmer of the Word!**

- 1) *Simply sow the seed.*
- 2) *Let the seed grow.*
- 3) *Marvel at the miracle God has performed!*

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."*

Jesus commanded his Church to: "*go and make disciples of all nations*" (Matthew 28:19). But how are we to do this? What programs should we have? How can we get the members of our community interested in us and connect with them?

Hold on a moment! If this is our line of thinking, we have to take a step back and look at the rest of Jesus command: *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* (Matthew 28:19-20). In other words we shouldn't worry about which programs to offer in order to "connect" with the community. Jesus wants us to simply preach the Gospel, teach His Word, and baptize those who desire it for themselves and their children.

Martin Luther, a pastor who had the most profound impact on the Christian Church since the time of the apostles, said this about his ministry: *I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philips and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. . . . I did nothing; I let the Word do its work.*

Now think about this: if God literally changed the world through Luther's simple preaching and teaching of God's Word, what should our outreach strategy be at Immanuel? What tools and programs should we be using to carry out our Savior's Great Commission? Simply the Gospel itself!

In our sermon text Jesus encourages us to **Be a farmer of the Word!** 1) *Simply sow the seed.* 2) *Let the seed grow.* 3) *Marvel at the miracle God has performed!*

Part One: Simply sow the seed.

Our text begins: *This is what the kingdom of God is like.* The kingdom of God is the Holy Christian Church – the grand sum of believers in heaven and on earth. And how does this Church grow? Jesus tells us: like a man scattering *seed on the ground.*

What is the most important thing a farmer must do to grow a crop? He must seed the soil. It does not matter how much he fertilizes or prepares his field - if he doesn't sow seed, there will be no crop.

What I am saying is pretty obvious, right? Then let us also apply this to the Gospel. The most important thing a Christian can do is sow the Word of God – tell people the Gospel. It does not matter how many programs we

offer the community, how much love and charity we show others - if we don't tell people about Jesus the Church will not grow.

So what does this mean for us at Immanuel? It means that our #1 priority should be sharing the Gospel. "But how?", you might be thinking, "I'm scared. They might ask me questions I do not know the answers to. I might say the wrong thing, etc . . ."

To answer those fears, let's go back to a farmer sowing seed. How difficult is it to sow seed? I am not talking about tilling, weeding, or anything else, I am talking about seeding. It's not very difficult at all: you just take seed and spread it around on the ground. Sowing seed is simple.

And so is witnessing the Gospel. All you do is take what God has given you in his Word and tell it to another person. It's as simple as telling someone: "Jesus died and rose again to pay for your sins. Repent and believe in Jesus and you will be forgiven and have eternal life."

Now someone might protest and say that witnessing Jesus is not easy – that sometimes it is met with hostility or an unwillingness to listen. Let me say this: I have never seen someone come to faith immediately after I told them about Jesus the first time. Some times my message was met with joy, a few times with hostility, but most of the time with indifference. So does this mean witnessing Jesus is useless? No. Why not? Well let me ask you this: have you ever planted a seed, and seen it immediately sprout up in front of you? No, of course you haven't. It takes time for the seed to germinate and grow. You can't rush it. The same is true with the Gospel. After we sow the seed, we need to simply let it grow.

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Part Two: Let the seed grow.

Out text continues: ²⁷ *Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.*

Seeds are miracles of nature. A kernel of wheat is small and hard. It looks dead and can stay dormant for years. But when it is planted, it comes to life. Every seed has life in it – God put it there – but to our eyes each seed seems lifeless.

What is true for seed is true of the Gospel. From a worldly point of view the Bible seems as lifeless and fictional as the rest of human literature. But the truth is this: the Gospel is not lifeless literature; it is like a living seed – full of life ready to spring forth once it is planted in the heart. God has attached His all powerful Holy Spirit to it. God promises that wherever his word is sown, it will have an effect: either leading a soul to life, or confirming a hardened heart in its unbelief.

Farmers spend lots of money on seed. How do they know it will grow? They simply trust that the seed will do what it was created to do. Yes, outside forces can hinder its growth, but even when the weather is bad, the farmer will still sow his crop because seeds can and often will surprise you.

So too we, who have been given the seed of the Gospel, need to have faith in the power of the Gospel. God tells us through Isaiah: *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 that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ 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. (Isaiah 55:10-11).*

Sow the seed of the Gospel. Show people from the Bible that they are sinners who are in danger of eternal death; and then tell them that Jesus paid for their sins, that death has been conquered, and that eternal life is theirs through faith in Christ Jesus. After doing this trust that the Holy Spirit will do his work.

There are two common mistakes novice gardeners can make after they plant. One is being impatient, feeling that it's up to you to get the plants to grow. If you over fertilize or over water your garden guess what will happen: You may stunt or ruin the growth of your plants. The same is true regarding the Gospel. If we don't trust the Gospel we sow and try to force or manipulate faith, we might actually hinder the Gospel itself.

The other mistake a gardener might make is being lazy – not doing any fertilizing, weeding and watering at all. While such a person's garden may still produce something, what it produces will be neither healthy nor strong. The same is true with the Gospel. God's Word alone has the power to create and strengthen faith, but don't let this be an excuse for laziness. Martin Luther, whom I quoted earlier in the sermon as letting the Word do all the work, was not a lazy person. On top of all the work he did reforming the Church, he was a professor, a visiting pastor, a counsellor, and had a family. He preached often and wrote extensively. Luther worked very hard with the Gospel, but he also knew not to interfere with it. He just let the Gospel do its work.

Even though the Gospel alone does all the work of converting, we will never finish the work of sharing the Gospel. Why? Because just like birds can eat seed that is freshly sown on a field before it has a chance to take root, so the devil can snatch the Gospel away from a person's heart before it takes root. Therefore we should not think that when we share the Gospel with a person once we don't have to share it with them again. How do we know whether or not the seed was allowed to germinate – or whether or not the devil snatched it from their heart? If the opportunity arises, proclaim the Gospel again. I remember a friend of mine telling me that you cannot dump too much grass seed when seeding a lawn. The same holds true for proclaiming the Gospel – you can't share it too much!

But once the seed is sown, leave it. Don't think that you can hurry it or cause it to grow faster by other things you do or say. The Gospel will sprout in its own time, as our text says: *All by itself the soil produces grain-- first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.*

Part Three: Marvel at the miracle God has performed!

Here in Wisconsin we see the miracle of seeds growing lush crops year after year. Fields as far as the eye can see - once dead and covered with windblown snow – are now green and alive! The small seeds that were planted produced plants that have many more seeds in them than what was sown.

What a miracle each individual seed is – and yet how easy it is for us to take them for granted. The good farmer doesn't. He realizes that, even though he worked hard in the field, it was God who put life in the seed and made it grow. It was the Lord who sent the sun and the rain. The LORD, not the farmer, is responsible for the harvest.

So we too ought to marvel at the miracle of the Gospel. Each one of you here is a miracle child of God working through the Gospel! Immanuel's faithful pastors had great joy in seeing the Gospel awaken faith in your hearts. And you also can have the same joy they had as you share the Gospel with your family and friends.

So dear brothers and sisters in Christ, here is God's great evangelism strategy for you: Be a farmer of the Word. Simply sow the seed of the Gospel – having full confidence in its life producing power. Just let the seed grow – not attempting to help it along by what you say and do. And then marvel at the miracle God performs. If we are faithful in sowing the seed of God's pure Gospel, we can be sure that in his good time, we will see a harvest. Amen.