

*Sermons at  
Hope Lutheran Church (ELCA)  
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June 17, 2018 (Proper 6, Year B)  
Mark 4:26-34

Today is Fathers' Day, a day to honor our fathers. And that's good, because dads don't get much respect these days.

A mother was out walking with her 4 year old daughter. The child picked up something off the ground and started to put it into her mouth. The mother took it away and said "Don't do that!"

"Why not?" asked the child.

"Because it's on the ground," said her mother. "You don't know where it's been. It's dirty, and it's probably loaded with germs that could make you sick."

The child looked at her mother with total admiration and said, "Mommy, you're so smart. How do you know all this stuff?"

The mother said, "All Moms know this stuff. It's on the Mom Test. You have to know it or they don't LET you be a Mom."

There was silence for a moment as the child thought this through. "Oh, I get it," she said at last. "And if you don't pass the test, you have to be the Daddy?"

Ah, Father's Day. It's not EASY being a Dad.

In our lesson from Mark, Jesus says, "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..." Now, Jesus obviously isn't INTENTIONALLY talking directly about fatherhood in this passage, but raising our children is one the GREATEST areas in which we PARTICIPATE in God's kingdom, and Jesus IS talking about that. Raising good children is like planting seed in the ground.

There are NO GUARANTEES, in raising kids OR planting seeds. A farmer can do all the right things and STILL LOSE a crop. And so can PARENTS. The farmer can till the ground at the right time, put in the right seed, and irrigate and fertilize by textbook. But that STILL doesn't GUARANTEE a crop.

Some of us have learned the HARD way that there ARE no guarantees, in plants...OR in people. In the end, God calls us to plant the seed and nurture it, but whether and HOW it grows isn't UP to us.

One day, a young boy named Thomas Edison was sent home from school with a note, and told that only his mother was allowed to read it.

(Watch video "Childhood of Thomas Edison")

Thomas Edison was mentally slow and unable to think clearly.

I know that a story about his mother, but I'm highlighting little THOMAS Edison here. People grow and mature at different rates. Winston Churchill was admitted to school in the lowest aptitude classes, and he never moved OUT of the lowest group in ALL the years he attended. Albert Einstein seemed so slow and dull that his parents feared that he was mentally retarded, as they called it back then. As one person put it, "Great minds and high talent, in most cases, cannot be hurried and, like healthy plants, grow slowly."

That's how it is with Kingdom of GOD too. We scatter the seed, but we're not ultimately RESPONSIBLE for its growth. We can't MAKE things happen. The process by which the kingdom of this WORLD BECOMES the Kingdom of God is a slow one, sometimes VERY slow, and it FRUSTRATES us. But, at the same time, if we have faithfully scattered the seed, we're not to BLAME for its FAILURE to mature IMMEDIATELY. It's not UP to us. Jesus cautions us here to be PATIENT.

It may take a LONG time to see the fruit of our labor. Parents know this. We see it in our children. Mark Twain wrote, “When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had LEARNED in SEVEN years.” It took 21 YEARS for MARK TWAIN’S FATHER to see the fruit of HIS labor.

Have you heard of the Chinese Bamboo Tree? To grow, the Chinese Bamboo Tree requires a lot of nurturing – watering, fertile soil, and sunshine.

If you plant the seed, water the tree, and add fertilizer for a whole YEAR, NOTHING happens. There are NO visible signs of growth in spite of providing ALL of these things.

After a second year of watering and fertilizing, AGAIN there’s NO GROWTH to be seen.

Three and four years on, there is STILL NO sign of anything happening. NOTHING to show for all your effort!

Your patience is tested, and you begin to wonder if your efforts caring for and watering the tree are worth it. People come by and say, “Hey, what’s up with this plant you keep putting so much work into. I’m just not seeing it.”

But then FINALLY, in the FIFTH year, something AMAZING happens – the Chinese Bamboo Tree grows 80 feet tall in just six weeks! They say that if it’s quiet enough, you can actually HEAR it growing.

But think for a moment, does the Chinese Bamboo Tree truly do NOTHING for four years. only to grow EXPONENTIALLY in the fifth?

In fact, for the FIRST 4 years, the tree was growing underground, developing a root system strong enough to support its POTENTIAL for growth in the FIFTH year. 80 feet in six weeks! Had the tree NOT developed a strong UNSEEN foundation, it couldn’t have sustained its FUTURE heights.

And had the Chinese Bamboo Tree FARMER STOPPED caring for it and watering it and fertilizing it, it NEVER would have burst through the surface.

When it comes to people’s HEARTS, a good crop may take YEARS to come in, SO LONG that the sewers may NEVER get to see it themselves, but Jesus says, “Have faith — the harvest is in GOD’S hands.” It takes faith to KEEP WORKING while you wait.

All we can do is rely on the promise that farmers and gardeners, and teachers and PARENTS already know—that what happens with the seed depends on GOD, and NOT on us. We can tend to it and do all we can to HELP the seed grow, but, in the end, WE don’t MAKE that seed sprout; GOD does.

When it comes down to it, we’re not called to be successful; we are called to be faithful. It’s simply our task to sow the seed, and to have FAITH, and leave the REST to God.

This is what the Kingdom of God is like. This is what farming and gardening is like. And this is what PARENTHOOD is like. Because this is what LIFE is like. Do what you can; trust GOD to do the rest. Amen.