

# SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

## Third Sunday After Pentecost

June 13, 2021

**Psalm 1:1–6 (ESV):**

### **The Way of the Righteous and the Wicked**

1 Blessed is the man

who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.

3 He is like a tree

planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers.

4 The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.

**First Reading: Ezequiel 17.22–24 (ESV):**

22 Thus says the Lord GOD: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. 24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high

tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.”

**EPISTLE:** 2 Corinthians 5:1–17 (ESV):

### **Our Heavenly Dwelling**

5 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, 3 if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. 4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

### **The Ministry of Reconciliation**

11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. 12 We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

## **THE GOSPEL - Mark 4:26–34 (ESV):**

### **The Parable of the Seed Growing**

**26** And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.  
**27** He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.  
**28** The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.  
**29** But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

### **The Parable of the Mustard Seed**

**30** And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? **31** It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, **32** yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out 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 without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

## **Sermon 24 – Third Sunday After Pentecost**

### **“You Are The Light of the... Mustard”**

#### **Mark 4:26-34**

Dear friends,

I hate mustard. I actually dislike all condiments, which accounts for how boring my tastes are for sure, but mustard is something I actively loathe. So when Jesus tells me that I'm like mustard I take a somewhat personal umbrage to this, this is the most disgusting of all things that I can possibly find on a sandwich or burger, and don't even get me started on cold potato salad. Flavor is what it is, tastes are what they are, and Jesus is who He is, so why does He use such a repulsive metaphor? What is this section of Mark all about,

really? I talked a lot about Mark and how Jesus in Mark is strange, we won't go through that again, but this is Jesus not just being strange, but actively counterproductive. Kinda like mustard in that regard. Mustard is supposed to make things taste better, to some it does, but to people like me the very presence of the stuff means I am categorically not going to eat it. So how is Jesus like mustard? Is that a hook? We'll find out as we proceed.

Again, I filled your ears and took way too much of your time talking about Mark in general last week, so we'll skip the overall picture here and just focus on the first part of chapter 4. Jesus begins this chapter of Mark with the parable of the Sower, one of the most incredibly basic and clear parables in Jesus' arsenal. He then explains this by telling them the whole reason He's speaking in parables in the first place. For people who are paying attention, who are engaged, the parables mean something and teach something. That is to say, for people who are recognizing who Jesus is, that this is the Son of God and the Word of God and He is bringing the Word of God to them to enlighten them about the kingdom of heaven, the parables teach something. To the rest of us, the parables are confusing, they can be taken in a bunch of different ways, and they generally don't make anything clearer. Jesus tells them that this is on purpose, and we'll get more into that in a minute. Jesus then goes on to compare the Word of God, to compare Himself, and everything He teaches, to a lamp that enlightens. After this, our text begins.

**“6 And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. 27 He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.”** I spent a lot of time with farmers when I was in Montana. Those memories are getting fuzzier as the years go by, which I'm very thankful for, very thankful to you for specifically, but I remember the humility that kind of had to go along with the job. Even if this isn't your job, you all do enough gardening to know full well how uncertain it is. You get those plants, they look fine, you put them in the ground, you give them the water they need, and then you do what? You wait. After the plant goes in the ground, your part in it is over. Now it is up to the plant, and that process can go well or badly. Sometimes you

can understand why your plants don't grow. Maybe you got too carried away too early in the spring, and you have some late freezes. Maybe the moles dug them up, or something like that. Sometimes, though, you put plants in the ground, you water them, and they just do not grow. So the same, when they do grow, there's not a lot of credit you can take for that. A seed is designed to grow into a plant. A zygote is designed to grow into a child. They're just doing their thing and there's not a whole lot we can do about it. Jesus says that this is the way the kingdom of God works. How so?

Other parts of the Bible helpfully fill us in. The Word of God is a thing of tremendous power, it can change hearts, it can change minds, it can completely transform the fundamental essence of a person. The Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, is like a sharp, two-edged sword, it pierces to the marrow, it slices through our self-delusions and makes us entirely different people. All of that is absolutely true, and very dramatic, isn't it? It sounds decisive and immediate, something tangible you can see and touch. Jesus reminds us that as true as it is, so much of it is outside our control. Like planting, you have your part to play, but it's an awfully small part. The Word of God is like a seed, it's put into the person, and then that seed goes to work. Some seeds grow overnight. Some seeds grow over weeks or months. Some seeds take years. Others take a lifetime. None of that changes the truth of it, or the power of the Word of God. It grows at its own pace. Faith does the same. We cannot force faith anymore than we can force a seed to grow faster. Your annuals will bloom when they bloom, your perennials will bloom when they bloom, and they will do that according to the genetic information in their seeds. There is very little you can do to effect it. Christian faith, Christian understanding, will grow at its own pace. It will grow on its own, so long as it is connected to the Word of God. Jesus sets the terms of His growth within everything you see, in churches, in people, and that is not something we can force or do. It just is. **“28 The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”** God will give the growth, God will make it

flower, God will make it deep in understanding, and finally God Himself will send the harvest. It is all up to God, and to God's Word. The Bible will reveal itself to you. Trust me on that. It will. It was not so long ago that I was listening to a copy of Ephesians on tape (yes, cassette tape) thinking this was a bunch of word-salad nonsense and wondering why I wasn't listening to music. But I kept listening, and now, God help me, I love Ephesians, even if I'm no closer to being an expert on the book. The formula, the recipe, for your Christian faith is dead simple, dear folks: If you hear it, it will come. If it doesn't come, keep hearing. It will come. If it came for someone as hyperactive and skeptical as me, it can certainly come for you. You don't understand God? What He says? You don't think it makes sense? Keep listening.

**“30 And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? 31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”** Small things can grow big, and the Word of God is no different. It is words on paper, usually words spoken by men like me. Nothing is cheaper in this age. You can listen to a thousand different radio programs or podcasts, you can watch generations in video, you can read all the books there is to read and we have made way too many of them. There are so many words out there, there are so many men claiming to have what you need. Words are so cheap, so easy to find, and so few of them can help us. An individual seed is nothing, you have to buy that stuff in bulk, particularly in this age where farming needs to be such a large-scale operation to be profitable. One seed is not what makes you your money, tons of seed does, right? The Bible is the same. It is a book with words. When I speak those words, it is added another layer of uncertainty and commonness to it. Just another pastor talking about the Bible. None of this looks like what it will end up being. What is that? The Bible ends up being life and salvation for us all, and it is hard to see that when you look at it on your coffee table

or your shelf. It's just another book, your eyes tell you, but it is so much more. Each of those words is another seed planted in you, ready to sprout forth to give you eternal life, peace with God, and understanding. It will just do it at its own pace, thank you very much.

So why all the attitude? If Jesus is here to give us the Holy Scriptures, to make us hear them, why does He tell these stories that are so hard to understand sometimes? Why doesn't everyone just get who Jesus is right off the bat? That's what He wants after all, He said it Himself, He wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Jesus does this because we need it this way sometimes. Sin makes us take the Bible, which is all about Jesus, and twist it so that it is all about us. Sometimes it is about us saving ourselves, getting into heaven all our own, being proud of how holy and righteous we are. Sometimes we twist the Bible to be about a to-do list for a good life, how to actualize our dreams and make it all work out like we want. Sometimes it is about trying to justify our sin using God's own words, I was particularly good at this one when I was young, a veritable masterclass into turning God's truth into lies I wanted to hear. The Word of God is here to tell us about our sin and how Jesus has dealt with our sin. It is here to show us that we are hopeless without God, that He is our hope, without God we are nothing but dust, doomed to a pointless life and death. But these are not things we want to hear. We get that attitude, we do, that attitude that I have to do it all on my own, that God must expect *something* from me, and by gum I'm going to do it. We get the attitude that Jesus can't be what He says, He has to be this way, or that way, because that's what we think and that's the way it has to be. It is this reason that Jesus speaks these parables. He explains everything to His disciples, He does teach His people, never forget that. But He will hide that teaching when we get our dander up and our sin has control of us. He will make it so we can't understand, to show us that we need to repent, we need to be broken of our sinful preconceptions, our prejudices, and see Him for who He truly is. We are sinners, He is our Savior. We are creatures, He is God. We are the servants, He is the master. No human will admit that without a fight, and rather than fight, Jesus puts us in

the doghouse for a while, puts us in the cooker, and lets things heat up a bit. But this is never in vain, for if we hear it, faith will come. It will come in its own time, and often it seems like we don't have enough time for it, but it will come.

Like the plants we nurture, like the children we raise, the true effect of the Word of God will sometimes not be seen for years. Like the mustard seed, the Word of God looks tiny and silly and ineffectual, what can this little seed do? But the Word of God will do it all, and Jesus will make sure of it. It will break those that need breaking. It will make you repent when that's what you need. It will give you the truth your heart desperately craves. It will give the life your body needs. It will grow into a mighty tree of faith when planted, and those trees grow into a forest. And it will do absolutely none of this according to your preferences and your timing or your effort. It will just do. Jesus will do it Himself.  
Amen