

“We WORK by Faith”

- I. Faith that God’s Word works.
- II. Faith that God’s Church is growing.

Dear Christian friends,

I’m sure you’ve heard the passage, **“We walk by faith and not by sight.”** The longer you live the more you learn HOW TRUE that is. How we’d love to live BY SIGHT – **even if only once** in a while! We believe that God is good – kind – wise – loving – forgiving. We believe that God is taking care of us and working all things for our good. We BELIEVE that – but it doesn’t always LOOK like that. **Sometimes** we’d rather shout, “WHERE are You, God?” Oh, that’s right – **“we walk BY FAITH and not by sight.”**

Looking at these parables Jesus teaches us that we also “WORK BY FAITH” and not by sight. **We work** with the faith that 1)God’s Word works and 2)that God’s Church is growing.

**I. The faith that God’s Word works.**

Mark tells us, **“With many similar parables Jesus spoke the Word to them.”** In other words we have here a SAMPLE of Jesus’ parables. Do you remember the DEFINITION of a parable? A parable is an earthly story with a **heavenly meaning**. Jesus uses something familiar from **everyday life** to ILLUSTRATE or EXPLAIN a spiritual truth.

These parables are about **“the kingdom of God.”** Now **“the kingdom of God”** is not a SPECIFIC PLACE like an earthly country. **“The kingdom of God”** is a SPIRITUAL kingdom – it’s God ruling in our hearts through His Word. It’s God saving sinners – bringing us to faith in Jesus – leading us home to heaven.

Jesus first parable illustrates that in **God’s kingdom** we WORK with a faith that God’s Word works. **“The kingdom of God is like”** a farmer planting his fields. ONCE PLANTED – then what happens? You don’t plant on Monday and harvest on Tuesday. You plant – and THEN YOU WAIT – wait for months! You TRUST that a crop will follow. You plant the seed and KEEP BUSY with other things. **“Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how ...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.”**

The seed is God’s Word – or as Peter wrote, **“You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God.”** BIG LESSON here – there is no growth WITHOUT God’s Word. If you don’t plant corn in the **spring** don’t expect to HARVEST any corn in the fall. You can work up your **fields** – spray and fertilize them – you can buy the seed. But if you DON’T ACTUALLY PLANT the seed you won’t harvest a crop.

If a person ISN’T IN God’s Word you can’t expect that person TO BE a Christian. You can’t expect that person to LIVE a Christian life or produce **“fruits of faith.”** The seed is NOT **being planted**. God’s Word is not GETTING TO WORK on that person’s heart. You could say that **like** an UNPLANTED FIELD there **will be all kinds of weeds** growing in that person’s life. Weeds of greed - selfishness - worry - doubt - **lust** - **drunkenness**, etc.

The seed **needs to be planted** to HAVE A CROP. God’s Word **needs to be used** for there to BE FAITH – a living, growing FRUITFUL faith. God’s Word is planted when we faithfully come to church

every week – when we have daily devotions at home during the week. God's **Word is planted** in Sunday School – Bible class – confirmation class – our Christian day school and high schools.

We plant God's Word and TRUST that it works. We don't always see IMMEDIATE RESULTS – in our own lives - in our congregation - on a **mission field**. We can get discouraged and frustrated. We need to remember that we WORK **“by faith and not by sight.”**

Take a look at your own life. Would you like to be MORE CONFIDENT in your relationship with God – **more sure** that God really does love you – that God really is taking care of you – that you really are going straight to heaven when you die? The ONLY WAY for **that to happen** is by USING God's Word – not HIT-OR-MISS but diligently – DAILY. But the growth – the **change** – won't happen OVER NIGHT or after reading a few chapters. **Sometimes** it may seem as if it isn't doing ANY GOOD at all to come to church and have those devotions. **Sometimes** we can come to **church** – come to **Communion** – and be SO REFRESHED and RENEWED and AT PEACE – and by Monday night we are TOTALLY DRAINED and **wiped out**.

We use God's Word TRUSTING that it works. And it DOES – OVER TIME. **“Night and day, the seed sprouts and grows. First the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.”** Look at your own life and see God's Word AT WORK. The ONLY REASON you are a Christian – that you have stayed a Christian **over the years** and through how many trials and **temptations** – is because God's Word was planted in your heart and it's growing. The ONLY REASON you are concerned about living a **God-pleasing** life – that you want others to know about Jesus – is because God's Word was planted in your heart and it's **growing**.

With these parables Jesus is telling us to SEE THINGS AS GOD sees them. WE might see only the **seed** and think WHAT GOOD will this do. GOD sees the bountiful harvest that comes **down the road**. Or in this second parable – WE might see how small the **mustard seed** is and think NOTHING BIG **will come** of it. GOD sees the full-grown plant that springs from that **little** seed. Yes, we WORK by faith – faith that trusts that...

## II. Faith that God's Church is growing.

**“Again (Jesus) said, ‘What shall we say the kingdom of God is like? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet 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.’”**

Jesus is telling us DON'T BE FOOLED by **appearances**. The mustard seed is so tiny but it doesn't just grow as **big as a tomato** plant. The mustard plant can **grow up** to 6 – 8 -10 FEET HIGH. It can have branches BIG ENOUGH for birds to perch on. You would NEVER THINK a plant that big would come from a SEED SO SMALL – but it does!

We work BY FAITH to **plant God's Word**. We trust that God's Church is GROWING. The seed God has given us SEEMS SO SMALL. A book – some water – bread and wine. What good can they do?

Doing what JESUS TELLS us to do – preach and teach the gospel – baptize – come to Communion – tell others about Him – invite people to church – train and **send** missionaries all over the place – **sometimes** that all seems like a LOST CAUSE. We can EASILY SEE things going wrong. Look **how many** members aren't in church. Children and adults get confirmed and you DON'T SEE many of them again. We live SO WELL OFF **compared to others** – and that's STILL TRUE today! – but the

church struggles to pay its bills. After years of work where ARE THE RESULTS of **mission** work? **Some** think the church needs to do things DIFFERENTLY – we need to CHANGE with the times.

Jesus tells us to TRUST that His Church is growing. God's Word seems SO TINY – like a "mustard seed." WHAT GOOD can come of it? We are to preach God's law – God DEMANDS that we be holy every minute of our lives. God CLAIMS total control of **every area** of our lives. Telling people they're SUCH ROTTEN sinners that the only thing GOD OWES them is a life that's hell followed by an eternity in hell – that UPSETS people and turns them off. They don't want to hear that. Yet GOD SAYS we must clearly preach His law to CONVICT and CRUSH **stubborn** sinners.

We are to preach God's gospel – the GOOD NEWS of Jesus. It's such a SIMPLE message. Jesus of Nazareth is God Himself born one of us. Jesus took our place under God's law and took care of everything to save us. Jesus actually lived a **life holy** in every way – He perfectly obeyed all the commandments – and He GIVES US all the credit for it. Jesus – the sinless Son of God – took the blame for the sins of the whole world and was punished in our place. Jesus died on the cross to PERSONALLY PAY for all our sins. **Three days later** Jesus rose from the dead – came out of His grave alive and victorious – nevermore to die. **Because of Jesus** God has forgiven all our sins. **Trusting** in Jesus we have peace with God and we are going straight to heaven when we die. **Some people think**, "Tell me SOMETHING NEW! I've heard all that before – it's BORING!" **Others think** it's all a FAIRY TALE.

Jesus tells us to baptize "***in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.***" We see a person get a LITTLE WET. Jesus tells us to eat and drink some bread and wine – it's certainly not enough to FILL you up. Some think all it does is make church LAST LONGER.

Look again at that "***mustard seed***" – SO SMALL – yet see it grow SO BIG. That simple gospel in Word and Sacraments is "***the power of God unto salvation to all who believe.***" Paul tells us that "***God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. He chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.***"

God's Church IS GROWING. You and I are living proof. That anybody IS A CHRISTIAN is proof that the Church is growing. God shows us the END RESULTS in Revelation – a "***great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne of God***" in heaven. Don't just see WHO'S NOT in church – see all who are. **Don't just see** BILLS to be paid – see also the **generous gifts** given. Don't just see who's all FALLEN AWAY from Jesus – **see all** who have stayed true to Jesus – who are GROWING in their faith – who love God's Word. EVERY ONE of those people – those gifts – those fruits – it's ALL BECAUSE and ONLY BECAUSE the **gospel works**. Are there things we can FINE TUNE or DO BETTER? There is always room for improvement. But there is NO IMPROVING on the gospel. There are NO SUBSTITUTES for the gospel.

Mark ends with this comment – "***With many similar parables Jesus spoke the Word to them, as much as they could understand.***" We could say Jesus KEPT PLUGGING ALONG – preaching and teaching – CONFIDENTLY PLANTING the seed. Jesus calls us to now WORK FOR HIM – to work BY FAITH – trusting that His Word works and that His Church is growing. Amen.

Sunday – "We Praise You, O God" – pages 48-49

Wednesday – Hymn #293