

Text: Mark 4: 26-34
Title: Side with the Seeds
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In this line of work it is easy to get jaded and cynical.

Oh, you see the beautiful moments of babies and baptisms and you get to know the stories of drunks who got sober and the bruised who found some healing, but you also get a good dose of the dysfunction, deception, and darkness that lurks under the surface. You stand front and center when love is promised, but you also feel the pain when vows are broken or marriages become long-lonely-slogs.

In this line of work it is easy to get jaded and cynical.

Maybe it is because you are afforded a front row seat to the brokenness of the pious and the piety of the broken. You discover that behind the fine facades of the religious there can be profound depravity and yet in the lives of some of the most visibly broken there can be moments of magnanimous grace.

But, if the truth be told all too often depravity proves to be the doctrine for which you have the clearest proof....

In this line of work it is easy to get jaded and cynical.

Maybe it's just one of the fruits of contemporary culture. When we're afforded an unprecedented, immediate, high def, digital view of man's inhumanity to man ~ maybe it's easy for all of us to be jaded, cynical, and discouraged. In the flood of philandering politicians and pedophile priests, in the waves of greed and gross injustice, in the wake of brutality and global problems that buckle the knees it is hard not to be discouraged or indifferent or retreat into whatever comforts or whatever numbs. When war and welfare are failed solutions, when churches do good but you also know that they are easily shams, when....

This is not whining.

I heard this week from the father of a Hope Church member who is working in Iraq in 130 degree heat to support his family here and how he is being sustained by other Christians there. And, when we face unemployment, or underemployment, or battle with disease and cancer...

The line is long for others who have it rougher, this is not whining.

It is the simple recognition that in this world it is easy to jaded, cynical, and discouraged.

But, then you stumble across this little parable!

Our text this morning is essentially a parable of hope. It is an antidote to cynicism and despair. "The Parable of the Growing Seed" is wedged in between the more popular "Parable of the Sower" and "Parable of the Mustard Seed," and it only shows up in the Gospel of Mark. (Matthew and Luke leave it out; John barely records any parables.)

But, here in Mark, Jesus offers, as a picture of the Kingdom of God, a man scattering seed on soil and then whether he sleeps or toils the seed sprouts and grows.

Whether he sits on the porch,
whether he pulls weeds,
whether he waits and watches,
whether he waters daily,
whether he goes to track and bets on the ponies,
the seed sprouts and grows.

The parable celebrates the mystery and miracle of a growing seed.

Now, verse 28 is worth noting:

All by itself the soil produces grain....

“All by itself” is actually the Greek word *automatos* from which we get “automatic” or “automatically.” And, it suggests an odd turn of phrase:

Automatically the seed sprouts.
Automatically the seed germinates.
Automatically the seed grows.
Automatically the seed and the soil and the sun and the rain...
produce a stalk,
which produces a head,
which produces a full kernel of grain,
which when it’s ripe is ready for harvest.

And, all of this happens automatically while the farmer is stretched out on a hammock. The whole thing has a “Jack and the Beanstalk” feel.

Of course there is dispute about the parable means. Is the seed Jesus Christ? Is the seed the preaching of the Word? If the parable points to the power of the seed or the process of germination how should it be interpreted? It certainly shouldn’t invite inactivity and indifference ~ should it? The point isn’t passivity ~ is it? The farmer still has to scatter the seed ~ doesn’t he? Then who is the farmer?

One problem with that line of questioning is it suggests that the parable has a simple one-to-one analogy and that is not necessarily the case. Parables offer a window, a world, a way of wondering....

This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed...

Martin Luther, the 16th century reformer, in reflecting on that time of transformation, upheaval, and change said:

I have opposed the indulgences and all the papists, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And then while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip and with Amsdorf, the Word so

greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor inflicted such damage upon it. I did nothing; the Word did it all. ... For it is almighty and takes captive the hearts, and if the hearts are captured the evil work will fall of itself.

Dear friends the Kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seed...

That is to say that the good news that God is salvaging creation in Christ will not die in the ground. That is to say that the good news that God is redeeming, restoring, and making creation right will not prove barren, will not return void, will not be defeated. Not because of what we do, but because of the work, the will, and the way of God.

It is easy to get cynical, jaded, and discouraged in this world.

It is easy to retreat into indifference or despair or distraction.

But, what if the very Kingdom of God is growing in and around us?

What if outside of, and even in spite of us, the Kingdom of God is germinating?

What if whether we sleep or slumber, whether we plow or plant, the seeds will automatically sprout and grow unto harvest because the power, the hope, and the mystery is in God and not in us.

The seeds are growing,
the Kingdom is coming,
the world will be made right.
Thanks be to God.

I am always a bit embarrassed when a sermon plays out like a parody of the preacher, but... Wilco is a scruffy-post-modern-endlessly-ecclectic-exceptionally-gifted-Chicago-based-rock-band, and a little while ago while watching a concert DVD in my basement... I heard lyrics not just as sounds but as words, and they caught me, they snagged me, they captured my imagination, and they encouraged me.

*Tires type black
Where the blacktop cracks
Weeds spark through
Dark green enough to be blue
When the mysteries we believe in
Aren't dreamed enough to be true
Some side with the leaves
Some side with the seeds*

Some side with the leaves.
Some side with the seeds.

I don't want to side with the leaves. I don't want to side with cynicism and despair. I don't want to side with all that falls like dead dry leaves. I don't want to side with greed, and complacency, and triumphalism, and indifference, and lust, and consumption, and individualism, and ...

I want to side with the seeds.

I want to side with the seeds of the kingdom where the prisoners are liberated, and the blind recover sight, and the oppressed are set free, and the dead are resurrected. I want to side with the seeds of justice. I want to side with the seeds of forgiveness. I want to side with the seeds of mercy.

I want to side with the seeds. They may seem buried at the time. They may lay doormat in the frozen tundra. They may seem forgotten and trampled under foot. But, the power is in the seed ~ not in the farmer.

And, dear friends:

Seeds are being planted in children at VBS this week.

Seeds are being planted in the work of these new elders and deacons.

Seeds are being planted in your heart and life.

Seeds are being planted in your children.

Seeds are being planted that will grow unto harvest.

Seeds are being planted at the common table of the King.

So, come to the table, where memory, hope, and promise are planted against cynicism and despair. Come to the table, because the Kingdom of God is like this:

A man scatters seeds...

Amen.