



# SAINT LUKE'S

THE 4TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
PROPER 6, YEAR B

EZEKIEL 17:22-24

2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-10,[11-13],14-17

MARK 4:26-34

PSALM 92:1-4,11-14

A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM OGBURN  
JUNE 17, 2018

✠ In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

As we move into the summer months, our Gospel readings take on themes of sowing and reaping - common and quotidian themes for most people at least up until the mid twentieth century. Although most of us are not farmers or planters ourselves, we can still connect with these themes. We can easily understand the need for planting, growth, maturity, readiness, and harvesting. It's a process that takes time and it also takes careful tending for a full harvest.

In Mark's Gospel, there is always a great sense of urgency. I always feel like I am being pulled or pushed along when reading Mark. It's the shortest of the Gospels, yet Mark has a great deal to say - and Mark always wants to tell us quickly. In Mark, Jesus is preparing us for the coming Kingdom of God. Jesus is telling us that God's Kingdom is urgently at hand and that we need to be ready to orient ourselves towards God, to pay attention and to be ready to recognize signs of the Kingdom of God, and to respond to them in our midst.

Today, Jesus tells us a little bit of what the Kingdom of God is like. Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how." He is saying that God's Kingdom grows and changes in ways that we can observe but not necessarily understand or control. It's a reminder that we don't do the growing. It also says we are not responsible for the outcome and we can take no credit. We can help in the sowing, the watering, and in keeping weeds away, but ultimately, growth is

up to God.

Jesus also says that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, small and of little consequence at first, and then despite the small size of its seeds becomes a huge shrub and becomes a haven for God's creatures. Jesus is telling us that our expectations of God's Kingdom will be different from what actually yields and that we just need to be okay with that reality. Our plans and expectations may seem wonderful, but God knows what is needed and what is best for us.

So much of what we learn about life, we know best through the rear-view mirror. When I look back over life, and think about what I planned for myself, and then think about what actually has happened, I am amazed because the plans and expectations that I have for myself are never as good as what God designs. The same is true with God's Kingdom. Jesus spends a lot of time talking about this urgent Kingdom of God. What God plans and does is always better than what we can ask or imagine for ourselves, usually because what yields isn't only good for me, but good for many.

When you hear the Kingdom of God, what do you imagine? Is it a place? Is it in the future?

Another way to translate kingdom here is rule or reign of God. "The Reign of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how." The Reign of God is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is

sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

When we hear it this way, it takes from some distant, future event and brings it into the present moment. Jesus doesn't tell us what God's reign will be like, he tells us how it is here and now. He doesn't tell us what the reign of God will be like. He tells us what it is like, because it's happening all around us.

And while we are called by God to sow seeds and harvest, God alone is responsible for the yield and for the growth. It is about faith in God being God. Faith is trusting that in God, things will turn out right even when we are not in control. Faith is, in part, letting go of our control over the results. That can be really hard. We don't necessarily want to be in control for the credit, but often we want to be in control in order to manage growth and that is the challenge. We live in a world where we fear losing control or letting someone else control our fate. We have been taught that in order to be successful, we must have a goal. Like Yogi Berra said, “If you don't know where you're going, you might end up someplace else.”

However, Jesus teaches us that the Reign of God works totally differently from what we expect and know to be obvious. Jesus helps us to realize that in God's Reign, the work of grace and mercy and compassion for the world, doesn't jive with human nature. That is why it is needed the most.

It can be most frustrating to those of us who don't like to wait and those of us who like to be in control. But at the same time, it is reassuring and freeing to know that in God's eyes, success is no judged by the size of the harvest but by

our faithfulness in sowing seeds.

In the process of growth and maturity, we learn to recognize the signs of God's Reign. We recognize these signs in the places where the harvest grows fullest. We know those signs as they manifest in mercy and compassion. We know them in justice and peace. We know them in beauty and truth. We know them in charity and love. These are the places where the Reign of God grows most abundantly.

We don't fool ourselves that everything around us desires the Reign of God to come near and flourish. There are forces at work that seek to stunt and cut short the harvest; forces at work that seek to destroy and devastate. These are the seeds of malice and hate, of selfishness and evil. Seeds of profanity and protectionism. Seeds of not caring.

There is a lot in our news-feeds these days that makes it look like the Reign of God is not prevailing. When immigrants fleeing their home for a better life are having their children ripped away from them at borders and then detained in inhumane conditions, this is an act of violence. It is working in direct opposition to the loving and faithful purposes of God and this kind of evil must be uprooted and destroyed.

Signs of the Reign of God are all around us. Would we but only begin to name them and share them and point them out to others. The signs are usually simple and ordinary: they are small acts of kindness, anonymous acts of charity, lending a hand, providing someone with their daily bread. No matter what the signs of the Reign of God are, they all have something in

common: they are rooted in God's love and they seek the good of others.

In our reading from 2nd Corinthians, Paul writes: "For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

In Christ, we are made a new creation. And our new purpose as new creatures is not to live for ourselves alone, but for Christ who died and rose for us that we all might be one and that we might build one another up. The old selfishness and hatred, the old self-doubt and shame, the old bitterness and coldness...those things have passed away. And God's Reign has planted within our hearts markers of Jesus' mercy, justice, peace, and love to sustain us in this world in order to root out the old. Even though evil and malice and complacency will try to grow in our hearts, God's reign won't be manipulated. God's faithful and loving purposes will continue to be worked out through us or in spite of us. And that the joy of God's harvest.

✠ In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.



THE CHURCH OF ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS  
487 HUDSON STREET  
NEW YORK, NY 10014

TEL: 212.924.0562

FAX: 212. 633.2098

WEB SITE: [WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG](http://WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG)

EMAIL: [INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG](mailto:INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG)