

Mark 4:26-29

A father had four children. One of the four was a rebel. He did not honor his father and mother. He dishonored God by how he lived. He was given instructions in the Faith. He was confirmed after being taught the catechism, but he promptly abandoned the church and never returned.

The father's second child was also taught the Christian Faith. She thoroughly enjoyed confirmation class. She was not the rebel that her older brother was, and yet she, too, fell away from the church. Not right away, but over a period of time. You could see it coming. She hung out with the wrong crowd. She made poor choices in life. She often missed church because she was out late with friends the night before. Her friends had no use for "organized religion" (as they put it), and she was not well-grounded enough in the Word of God to be able to see the devil working through them. It didn't take all that long before she had discarded the Faith entirely.

The father's third child also went to catechism class and was confirmed into the church. But he had a taste for the finer things in life, and before long, his desire for riches choked the Word of God right out of his heart and life. He fell in love with a popular girl who cared nothing for the church, and to keep her happy by giving her what she wanted, he worked two jobs so that he had no time for the church anymore. He, too, along with his brother and sister, fell away from the Faith.

But the father had a fourth child, and this child was a joy. She received no special privileges. She was raised in the same house under the same rules. She was loved by her father and mother just as the others were loved. But she loved the Word of God more than the others had. When in catechism class, she saw the teaching as the foundation upon which to build her life. When in church, she hung on every word that was spoken. She paid attention to the messages in the hymns that she sang. And she thought about all she had learned throughout the week. She was determined to marry a young man who loved the Lord just as she did; not a man who would drive her away from the church. When she was raising her children, she took their baptismal vows seriously. She taught them to pray. She read Bible stories to them day after day. She, and her husband, brought them to church and Sunday School faithfully. Her entire life she lived in the love of the Lord, and she died in the Faith just as she had lived in it.

Now you might recognize this parable as that of the Sower and the Seed. It comes just before our text for today in St. Mark's Gospel. The parable of the Sower and the Seed is technically not before us today, but in a way it is--because our text, the parable of the Growing Seed--is the fourth type of soil in the previous parable. The first three children are like the hardened path, the rocky ground, and the ground full of thorns and thistles. The fourth child is the good soil which produced a bountiful crop not just in her life, but also in the lives of her children.

Now surely that father lived in sorrow because of his first three children. And surely he lived with regrets. "If only," he would have said to himself, "I had done this, or that, they would have turned out differently; they would not have forsaken the church." Some of you live with those same regrets. You blame yourself for the poor choices your loved ones have made in life. But that father did not heap praise upon himself for how his fourth child turned out. He had read today's text often enough. The man who scattered seed on the ground went to bed each night and arose each morning, and the seed sprouted and grew, and he did not know how. He scattered the seed. He worked the ground. And yet he knew that the seed grew not because of him. And so the father knew that his fourth child was a strong Christian woman who loved the Lord and His Word, who lived her faith, but it was not because of him. It was God who had done this for her. He gave her the gifts of His Holy Spirit. He established

her in the Faith. He preserved her to the end. God worked through this father. He was the means...one of them...through which God caused His seed of the Word to grow bountifully in this child. Yet the father knew that his daughter would be in heaven not because of him, but because God used him to bless her with His precious treasures in Christ.

Every Father's Day he would receive four cards in the mail--sometimes three. When they called, he would tell each one of his children that he loved them. And each and every night he prayed for all four of them. He thanked God for what He was doing in his fourth child. And he commended to God the souls of the others. Over time he learned to stop blaming himself. He learned this by hearing the Gospel again and again. Jesus had taken his blame upon the cross. Jesus had died for this father and for all of his children. Where the father had failed, Jesus had forgiven him. Where the father had done what was right for his family, it was Jesus who did what was right through him. And that father knew that his joy in heaven would not be any less even if his first three children never, by God's grace, were brought back to the Faith. Every day this father struggled. And yet every day he lived with joy. Until the day he died, he continued to love his children. He continued to pray for them. And he continued to be a Christian example for them.

My friends, day by day the seed of God's Word is sprouting and growing here in the soil of Christ Lutheran Congregation. Does it grow the same in every heart and life? No. But it grows because it is being scattered here. The father who stands in this pulpit--for I am your spiritual father in the Lord--loves each one of you, prays for each one of you, and has failed, in some way, with each one of you. No earthly father can take credit for how his children turn out--when they honor God by how they live. And no spiritual father, no pastor, can take credit for the members of his congregation who grow in the Faith and in their love for the Lord and for their fellowman. The seed grows, and he who scatters the seed does not know how. All he knows is that it is God who is doing it, not him.

Every earthly father, and every spiritual father knows in his heart that he is full of weakness and sin, and that the members of his family, or his congregation, could truly point out his failures without any trouble at all. On this Father's Day let us remember to forgive our fathers, and our mothers. And we who are fathers and mothers, let that forgiveness begin with us as we forgive those in our families or in our congregation. Jesus took your weaknesses. He took your sins. He took your blame. And whether you are a father or a mother, a son or a daughter; whether you are faithful to Him, or whether you have been faithless, He died for you. He forgives you.

His precious seed will not grow within you when you stay away from where His seed is given. And so, out of love for each one of you, He calls you today to be faithful. There is good soil here in Christ Lutheran Congregation. I'm looking at it. And even more, the seed sown here is of God. It is for you, for your family, for all whom you love. What a joy for this father to go to sleep each night, and rise each morning knowing that the seed of Christ is growing within you, not because of me, but because of Jesus. Amen.