

## Sermon – Our Saviors Lutheran Church- June 17<sup>th</sup> 2018

Text- Mark 4: 26-34

### Mustard and Church

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Interesting Gospel lesson in front of us this worship day. Jesus is using the parable form of teaching. A tool he employed numerous times. The parable has to do with farming. For me, the issue of farming is on a different planet. I, like the song that Billy Joel wrote, grew up in a NY State of Mind. I was used to concrete, and stickball in the streets, and a slice from the various pizza parlors- sometimes two to a street.

When I first retired from Our Saviours #1 in Appleton, the then, Bishop Justman asked me to take over a small church in Lessor, Wisconsin. It was smack dab in the middle of farm country, near Pulaski. What did I know about farmers or farming? Actually nothing. I remember one of my first council meetings. One of the council members asked if we could have evening Lenten Services. I said, "sure." The member explained that the service could be at 7:30PM and a large meal would follow with many deserts prepared by the women of the congregation. He thought we could eat at 8:30PM. I remember looking at him and saying, "ah fine but isn't that a little late to eat?" He looked at me and said, "Pastor, we are farmers. That's when we eat". Who knew? Or the time I was upset that one of the confirmands missed an important class session. I was ready to chastise the young man until he said, "sorry Pastor, but I was birthing a calf." Kind of different than a kid saying the subway broke down.

Well, over those two years and then another one at a later time, I learned a lot about farming and what a rough and tough life it was. First the weather. The variables would keep the strongest person awake with sleepless nights. Too hot, too windy, too dry, too wet. Had to be just right.

Then there is the issue of the economy. The farmer is at the mercy of the prevailing markets. When my friend Bill Kolaske wants to sell his older chickens, he doesn't say, "this is my price for my chickens". Rather he has to say, "What will you give me for my chickens?" Same with cattle, corn or wheat. The market controls the price. Only recently are eggs commanding a higher price based on supply and demand. And then more stuff that the farmer cannot control. Crops

might get a disease, tractor might break down, you might have more daughters than sons, or anything else. Yes, the farmer has a tough life.

So in the first parable, Jesus describes the basics of farming and relates it to the kingdom of God. You plant the seed, it grows, and then you harvest the crop. Maybe Jesus should have warned us that bad stuff could happen- you know- crazy parishioners, stubborn churches, selfish people. But he didn't.

But in the second parable we have a real glimpse of the church. It's about a mustard seed. To be honest, I have never seen a mustard seed or for that matter a mustard bush. So, I did some research. That's what we call google. Yes, it is the smallest of seeds yet grows to a bush that can be four feet tall. Its root system spreads underground and chokes every other plant in the garden. It usually attracts many birds which find shelter in the bush. Most farmers have a dislike of birds. All they do is eat all the newly planted seeds, poop on tractors, and create havoc.

And not only that, the mustard bush stinks. Is that what the Kingdom of God is like? Yes. It is.

You see, Jesus is giving us a clear message. The mustard seed is small and will grow large. So that also happens with the message of Jesus. The mustard bush is messy and so is the church filled with birds of unknown origin.

The message of Jesus started small with a loose, ill equipped band of believers who had no idea what to do or say. 2000 years later this mustard seed has spread throughout the entire world. The church has created hospitals, universities, social service organizations, and has touched millions of lives. Who would have known that this little seed in Bethlehem could have done that? God knew.

But, there always is a 'but' in a good homily. The mustard bush attracted birds. For most farmers and churches they are not a welcome sight. They get in the way, they don't know how we do things, how we speak here, how we worship here!

A look back at my childhood. Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn. Occupied by mostly Norwegians, Swedes, Germans and a few other European types. Churches were booming. Standing room only. Almost every church would resemble a cathedral

today. That was in the 1950s and 1960s. I travel there at least once a year. Now those same churches have about 20-25 at worship. The large worship structure is still there but the worship service is almost empty. Why? They didn't want the other birds in. Kind of funny and sad. Early Norwegians resented the fact that when non-Norwegians began showing up, they had to change their worship to English. Teenagers began to come in blue jeans instead of suits. Drunks would show up but the good people in the church would send them away. People of color came, pregnant single Moms, gays came, AA members came, all looking for a place of shelter and were quickly dispatched. They didn't like or want messy. And so they are dying.

Well here we are. Our Ministry Site Profile is being compiled. And you and I know that there is much work to be done. There are countless people who live all around our church who need to hear the word of God's grace. They may be different than us. Their lives might be messy and when we reach out to them, that night be messy as well. And who knows, we might have to change some stuff. So, do we put up a sign that says- No New Birds Welcome Here. Or give them a test for Communion?

Or do we hang a a sign that says

All Are Welcome In This Place. We Welcome Everyone.

That's the vision I have for Our Savior's. Everyone's welcome. We are just as messy as you are. But here in this place, God's love will surround you. And this wonderful place will explode.

Amen- Let it be so.