

Pastor Jon's Sermon on June 16, 2024 based on the Parable of the Mustard seed in Mark 4:26-34 "The Kingdom of God is Like a Zucchini Plant"

The Kingdom of God is like a farmer scattering seed then going to bed... and a mustard seed that grows into the greatest of all shrubs, LOL, that shelters all kinds of birds. Whenever you see the construction kingdom of God or Kingdom of heaven is like in the Gospels, I invite you to think of God's dream for the world. It is the way the world that Jesus brought to earth should be. A place of justice and peace for all.

If you read my article in the churches weekly email, I was playing around with the sermon title: "The Kingdom of God is like a Zucchini plant." Because the Greek word for shrub in the Mustard seed parable can be translated as garden plant. What is the greatest of all garden plants? of course, Zucchini. It just keeps growing and growing and growing. Zucchini are abundant, you can't help but to give it away. However, you can only eat so much zucchini bread, right?

Garison Keillor in the radio show Lake Wobegon said, Zucchini are another story altogether. These "alien" zucchini grow big and menacing by hiding out under their own broad leaves, so wide and sheltering that often you do not even know the zucchini are there. But they are. And someday they will be big enough to stand up and look you in the eye.

He said, "Just remember one thing: these zucchini are huge. If a neighbor puts several of them on your back porch one evening, you might not be able to get out of your back door the next morning."

There is a whole lot of growing language in our lessons this week.

The first lesson, which we didn't read has God as an arborist, who will take a sprig of cedar and plant it on a high mountain so that every kind of bird can live under its shade. But really the prophet is talking about a Messiah who will come and provide a place of refuge and safety for all birds, even old birds like us.

In our Psalm, we are reminded that when we are planted in the house of the Lord, like a palm tree or cedar tree, we shall flourish and still bear fruit in our old age.

Planting seeds takes time and patience for them to come to fruition. So, it goes with our faith. Seeds of faith can lay dormant for a long time. But when the conditions are right, through the Holy Spirit and the hearing the Word of God, they can sprout and grow... much to our surprise.

For example, I no longer need to plant tomatoes in my back yard, they pop out of the ground every spring, because of the ones that die on the vine and fall to the earth. Then I choose a few each year to nurture and cage. Free tomatoes.

In Mark 5, Jesus teaches several parables to his disciples and anyone within an earshot about his kingdom.

The first parable is known as “The seed growing secretly.” A farmer scatters seeds and then goes to bed. What kind of farmer is this? One who clearly has no trouble sleeping at night. But also one who doesn’t need to control outcomes. He just scatters the seed, takes a snooze, and is in awe of the daily growth. Jesus says, the earth produces of itself. I am like to not like this, I like to hover over my gardens... stare at it... protect it.

How can the farmer just let things be and trust like that? That’s the point, I think. God’s kingdom is breaking in as we speak. We don’t always see it or know how, but trust that God is working in all things. God can use all situations, good or bad, to help us grow deeper in our faith. Also, this is a reminder that we can only do so much, the Holy Spirit has to do the rest. Our job is planting seeds of faith and love. It is not how pious we are or how wonderful we are. It is only by God’s grace that we grow in God’s garden.

In our Second Reading from 2nd Corinthians 5, we are reminded that we walk by faith, not by sight. We can’t always see God’s presence clearly, especially when we are going through hard times. But Paul tells us to have confidence and hope in the promises of our faith when it comes to facing our challenges or . Jesus died for all. We too can

experience resurrection hope while we are alive. Paul concludes, “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!” When we are baptized in Christ and have faith, we are a new creation every day. We can make friends with the past and begin new every morning. Today is Day one of the rest of our lives.

Luther explains the petition, “Thy Kingdom Come” in the Lord’s Prayer in his small Catechism:

In fact, God’s kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us.

How does this come about?

Whenever our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that through the Holy Spirit’s grace we believe God’s holy word and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity.

Then there is the mustard seed. When sown upon the ground, the smallest of all seeds becomes the greatest of all shrubs.

There is humor in this.

The joke here is not only that mustard seeds are tiny, but that the people in Jesus’s day didn’t *plant* mustard seeds. Mustard was a weed — an invasive species. If a 1st century gardener would never plant it, it would quickly take over his land.

This would be like a gardener planting dandelions.

Debi Thomas says that The kingdom of God is all about welcoming all... the unwelcome. Sheltering the unwanted. Practicing radical inclusion. The garden of God doesn’t exist for itself; it exists to offer hospitality to everyone the world deems unworthy. It exists to attract and to house we would rather leave out. I heard the Southern Baptist Convention almost voted by 2/3 to not allow women pastors

For all of us, we are called to do the little things. To scatter seeds of the kingdom and rest in God’s grace for ourselves and others. We are to embrace the weeds in our lives and the lives of others and proclaim

forgiveness. May the church be a place of rest, safety and shelter for all birds. Amen