

Lutheran Church of the Master  
580 Kuhn Road, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188  
Curt Gerald, Interim Pastor  
June 13/14, 2009  
Second Sunday after Pentecost  
“Gathered Around the Word: Hi Ho, Hi Ho, It’s Off to Work We Go”

## **MARK 4:26-34**

[New International Version](#) (NIV)

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### The Parable of the Growing Seed

<sup>26</sup>He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. <sup>27</sup>Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. <sup>28</sup>All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. <sup>29</sup>As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

### The Parable of the Mustard Seed

<sup>30</sup>Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? <sup>31</sup>It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. <sup>32</sup>Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."

<sup>33</sup>With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. <sup>34</sup>He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

[The Message](#) (MSG)

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### Never Without a Story

<sup>26-29</sup>Then Jesus said, "God's kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows—he has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without his help: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. When the grain is fully formed, he reaps—harvest time!

<sup>30-32</sup>"How can we picture God's kingdom? What kind of story can we use? It's like a pine nut. When it lands on the ground it is quite small as seeds go, yet once it is planted it grows into a huge pine tree with thick branches. Eagles nest in it."

<sup>33-34</sup>With many stories like these, he presented his message to them, fitting the stories to their experience and maturity. He was never without a story when he spoke. When he was alone with his disciples, he went over everything, sorting out the tangles, untying the knots.

Welcome to the second half of the Church Year.

The first half includes:

Advent (when the color is blue)

Christmas (when the color is white)

Epiphany (when the color is green)

Lent (when the color is purple)

Holy Week (when the color is scarlet: blood red)

Easter (when the color is white)

Pentecost (when the color is red)

Trinity Sunday (when the color is white)

During that colorFULL part of the Church Year, the Church around the world focuses its attention on the head of the Church ... Jesus, the Christ ... the promise of his coming in Advent, the celebration of his arrival on earth in Christmas, the meaning of Jesus during Epiphany, his walk to Jerusalem during Lent, the events between Palm Sunday and his burial during Holy Week, the celebration of his resurrection during Easter, the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday, and a doctrinal statement of who God is (three in one) on Trinity Sunday.

The early Church set this all up because it was a rural community in the Northern Hemisphere of the globe ... it had to work during the summer months ... and it had to celebrate Jesus during the unbusier time of year (December through May) ... the time of the year when the Church HAD the time for contemplation.

But then, just like rural communities today, when spring arrived and summer work had to be done, the early Church focused its attention on the WORK of the church itself (June through November) ... what you and I might call the Body of Christ which is all who have been baptized into the Community. And just like all of nature around us, this is a growing season .. so the liturgical color for the next six months will (usually) be green.

In the Lutheran tradition, you may recall that up to the Lutheran Book of Worship, this season was called the Trinity Season ... in those days today would be "The First Sunday after Trinity." With the publication of the Lutheran Book of Worship, we specifically chose to join with our Episcopal and Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in seeing these Sundays as the Pentecost season. But I really think the Roman Catholics ended up doing it right in their rather recent move to refer to this season as "Ordinary Time." Today in their calendar is "The Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time." (If you were the reader today, you would note that this Lectionary refers to today's lessons as "Lectionary 11".)

So in this ORDINARY time of year, the Gospel lesson talks about a mustard seed ... and what could be more ordinary than this little bitty seed? What I found interesting is that something as small and ordinary as a mustard seed is referred to by almost every religion in the world!

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mustard\\_seed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mustard_seed)

In the [Parable of the Mustard Seed](#), [Jesus](#) compares the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed. He uses three facets of the mustard seed to illustrate three facets of the kingdom. The small seed represents the small beginnings of Christianity. The rapid nature of the plant's growth foretold how Christianity would take the Roman world by 313. The size and strength of the plant takes in all kinds of birds indicating Christianity would take in every nationality of believer. Not only does Jesus teach about the kingdom of heaven as a mustard seed but also tells his disciples to have faith like a mustard seed. Although having some of the smallest seeds, the [mustard plant](#) grows to a large size, providing shelter for birds: Mark 4:31-32. Their growth is persistent and powerful enough to crack cement when growing.

Inspired by this parable, aristocrat Nikolaus Ludwig von [Zinzendorf](#) founded the Order of the Mustard Seed in Germany in 1715.<sup>[2]</sup> The aims of the order were to be true to Christ, kind to all people and to spread news of the gospel to the world.

[Gautama Buddha](#) also told the story of the grieving mother and the mustard seed. When a mother loses her only son, she takes his body to the Buddha to find a cure. The Buddha asks her to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a family that has never lost a child, husband, parent or friend. When the mother is unable to find such a house in her village, she realizes that death is common to all, and she cannot be selfish in her grief.<sup>[3]</sup>

In the [Quran](#), God states that the scales of justice will be established on the Day of Judgment, and no soul will suffer the least injustice. Even the equivalent of a mustard seed will be accounted for because God is the most efficient reckoner.<sup>[4]</sup>

Jewish texts compare the knowable universe to the size of a mustard seed to demonstrate the world's insignificance and to teach humility.

A seed that is small in size yet persistent in its growth. When it grows it can crack concrete.

So, Jesus says, the Kingdom of God is like planting seeds ... which might make you think of another of his parables ... actually, the story I'm thinking of is found at the beginning of this same chapter of Mark (4:1-20)

## The Parable of the Sower

<sup>1</sup>Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge.

<sup>2</sup>He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: <sup>3</sup>"Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup>As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

<sup>5</sup>Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no

root. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. <sup>8</sup>Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."

<sup>9</sup>Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

<sup>10</sup>When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. <sup>11</sup>He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables <sup>12</sup>so that,

" 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,  
and ever hearing but never understanding;  
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'"<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? <sup>14</sup>The farmer sows the word. <sup>15</sup>Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. <sup>16</sup>Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup>But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. <sup>18</sup>Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup>but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>20</sup>Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."

I presume the Lake this text refers to is the Sea of Galilee ... and Jesus gets into a boat so he can speak to the crowd gathered on the hill by the lakeside ... Eileen and I probably walked on that lakeside last year ... and the group from our Church sailed on that Sea of Galilee in what is referred to as "a Jesus Boat" which is considered to be probably a model similar to boats from 2000 years ago that would have been in use here. (Again, as I've said before, if we had screens here I'd be projecting the image of that boat so you'd have a sense of where this was. But ... first I or someone else will have to convince you that screens aren't Satanic and could be and I would suggest should be in a worship space!)

And Jesus through both of these teachings is telling the folks that the purpose of the Church is to keep planting the seed!

Now, not all of us like to do gardening! So perhaps another story from the first chapter in Mark will help us get the idea.

Do you remember "The Calling of the First Disciples?" Let me remind you ... Luke 1: 14-20

<sup>14</sup>After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

<sup>15</sup>"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

<sup>16</sup>As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." <sup>18</sup>At once they left their nets and followed him.

<sup>19</sup>When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. <sup>20</sup>Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Let's pretend that we are on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus this morning and that this sanctuary is the boat. (By the way, a boat is one of the earliest Christian symbols of the Church. In Scandinavian churches, a model of a ship often hangs somewhere in the church often pointed towards the altar to symbolize this.)

The Sea of Galilee is 13 miles long (north to south) and 8 miles wide (east to west). Let's lay that over where we are right now ... and let's call this the Master's Lake (since we are the Lutheran Church of the Master) ... except let's make it a perfect circle seven miles out in every direction from where we are right now ... and let's super-impose on that the recent study that we received from Percept ... and let's say that Jesus is telling us (his disciples gathered in this boat) that our task is to go fishing for people for Jesus.

Do you realize that in this lake right now there are @411,860 people

Well educated (37% of those over 25 years old are college graduates compared to 24% national) = @152,388

31% of these people are between 28 and 48 years old ... =@127,676

26-37% of these people are 17 years old or YOUNGER ...=@152,388

And where this boat sits right now is right in the middle of an area classified as TRADITIONAL AFFLUENT ... AT 268.4% ABOVE national average.

31-43% of them have no faith involvement: =@177,099

Now I know less about fishing than I do about planting seeds ... but I do know that if I'm going to go fishing I need to know what I'm fishing for and use the appropriate bait. And you know what, for the fish in the Master's Lake, this study shows what the best bait is.

In this community, the best bait needs to combine traditional with contemporary. The survey tells us that two best baits to use in this community are:

Roman Catholic (32% over the national trend of 24%) = 131, 795

... and ...

Lutheran (15% over the national trend of 7%) = 61,779

Now I'm pretty sure that if you added up all those people ("fish") currently gathered in all the Lutheran or Roman Catholic congregations in located in or serving the area covered by the Master's Lake, you would not find a total of 193,574 people or fish or ... let's just say like Bishop Osterbur of the Illinois District of the American Lutheran Church used to say: "People dearly love of God."

And the difference is our job description which we share with all Christian sisters and brothers in Carol Stream and the surrounding communities submerged in and under the Master's Lake.

And the only way this is going to happen here on the lake is that you will seek them out one by one and invite them to the table ... not to BE the meal but to SHARE IN the meal.

See, for the next 6 months, this green parament is going to be hanging on this altar with the fish net on it to remind us that we have work to do.

So ... HI HO, HI HO, ITS OFF TO WORK WE GO...and for the next 25 weeks, we're going to be talking about our job!

AMEN

At the beginning of the service, Pastor Gerald asked the following questions and referred to the chart on the next page:

- (1) When you think about this congregation, do you feel it is:
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ Large
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Mid-sized
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ Small
- (2) Have you ever asked, "why isn't this church growing?"
- (3) Did someone invite you to worship at the Lutheran Church of the Master ... perhaps they invited you to join them ... or did you find this congregation on your own?
- (4) How many people have you invited to come to worship with you here at the Lutheran Church of the Master in the last five years? \_\_\_\_\_
- (5) What is the name of the last person you invited to worship with you here at the Lutheran Church of the Master?
- (6) Do you think that questions #4 and #5 have something to do with Question #2?

How Large is Your Congregation  
Compared With All ELCA Congregations?  
(2008)

Size in Average Attendance	Number of Congregations	Percent of Congregations	Percentile
1001+	44	0.4%	100.0%
751 to 1000	49	0.5%	99.6%
501 to 750	182	1.8%	99.1%
351 to 500	364	3.5%	97.3%
251 to 350	620	6.0%	93.8%
<b>201 to 250 *</b>	<b>661</b>	<b>6.4%</b>	<b>87.8%</b>
151 to 200	984	9.5%	81.5%
101 to 150	1,686	16.3%	72.0%
76 to 100	1,346	13.0%	55.7%
51 to 75	1,749	16.9%	42.7%
36 to 50	1,177	11.4%	25.8%
21 to 35	995	9.6%	14.5%
1 to 20	503	4.9%	4.9%
Total	10,360	100.0%	

*\*Note from Pastor Gerald: This is the current classification for this congregation since we started counted only those in the worship service. My understanding is that in previous years everyone in the building was counted, which meant that it also included Sunday School students who may or may not have been in worship.*

Source: Annual Congregational Report Forms. Prepared by ELCA Research and Evaluation.

<http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Research-and-Evaluation/Facinating-ELCA-Facts.aspx>

***Now, think about that first question on page 6 again.***