

# **SERMON**

## **Pentecost 3 Year B**

The Gospel Mark 4:26-34

Jesus said, “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. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It 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.”

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

**Blessing:** In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit....

**Sermon:**

Dana and I raised our kids in Bakersfield, California.

Bakersfield is Capital city of Kern County. <sup>i</sup>

Bakersfield isn't beaches. It's not LA and it's not Silicon Valley.

It's Agriculture. It's farms, and orchards and ranches.<sup>ii</sup>

In 2018, Kern County's produce was worth almost \$7.5 billion.

- \$555,440,000 in table grapes, and \$437,300,000 in Milk.
- \$405,000,000 in Almonds; and
- \$174,216,000 cow/calf operations, fed by  
\$106,000,000 of Kern county Hay and Alfalfa.

So, Bakersfield is not the California most people think of.

But being from Bakersfield,

is why today's agricultural parables spoke to my heart.

Jesus told parables about familiar things,

to help us understand something that isn't familiar.

In the Greek, a parable<sup>iii</sup> is an analogy or illustration.

Jesus's parables<sup>iv</sup> were about sowing a seed, watching it grow,  
and then, in the right time, harvesting the crop.

Jesus didn't mention that some seeds don't take root.

But we already know that.

God's best advice sometimes fall on deaf ears!

Even the best seeds don't always prosper.

*We have to plant the seeds. We have to give it our best shot.*

*We have to tackle the work in Faith.*

Dana and I raised our girls in Bakersfield.

Merle Haggard's from Bakersfield. Well actually he's from Oildale.

Across the Kern River from Bakersfield.

We listened a lot to Merle Haggard.

You know, God sows a seed. God starts out small.

Merle started out rough. He spent time in San Quentin.

But he turned out OK. <sup>v</sup>

Not every seed grows up.

For every guy like Merle, two dozen others slide away.

Not every seed grows up. That's how the Kingdom works.

Some of us have advantages. Most of us don't.

Merle grew up rough. They lived in a railroad car.

Hungry and rowdy and poor. But God blessed his work.

Some of us have too little. Some have too much.

Either way, we each have to push through.

Some of us do. Some of us don't.

I remember my Grandma and Grandpa,

on a little farm in Siloam Springs, Arkansas.

Grandma used to catch and fry an old chicken, on Sunday.

She'd often say odd stuff like, "God's ways are mysterious".<sup>vi</sup>

Grandma was a tough old Baptist. She made great fried chicken.

When she was mad, she'd make a Soldier blush.<sup>vii</sup>

But, Grandma was right. *God's ways are mysterious.*

God sows the seeds. And we don't know if a crop will come up.

*Farming is about faith in action. And so is living.*

Living in faith isn't about the future, or the past.

*Living in faith is about living right now.*

"Here at the quiet limit of the world ...

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,

The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,

Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,

And after many a summer dies the swan."<sup>viii</sup>

When I was in seminary, studying with Mennonites,  
I often heard that God's Kingdom is *both* already here,  
And still yet to come. I agree. *That's true.*

Heaven isn't pie-in-the-sky, and it isn't a million miles away.  
*It's right here, right now.*

Some of God's seeds grows into a tree.  
St. Christopher's needs to be that kind of a seed!

We don't know what'll happen, when God plants a crop,  
but God does.

*Our job is to nurture the seeds that God plants.*

Our job is to protect the seedlings from the storms.

Our job is to water God's field of dreams, and to  
love whatever and whomever God sends us.

The field of dreams is tended with patient labor and love.  
When we lend our hand, one day, when God chooses,  
The crop will be ready for harvest.

Many of Jesus' followers expected a Messiah that would  
kick out the Romans and return Israel to its ancient glory.<sup>ix</sup>  
And after that ... God's Kingdom would come.

The Jewish faithful had (impatiently) waited for hundreds of years.

But, stuff didn't happen like they thought it would.

They made the same mistake, that we make today:

*instead of organizing our lives and plans around Jesus,*

*we try to fit Jesus into our lives and plans.*

*Living in faith is about living right now.*

Our modern impatient world is consumed with

racket and noise and nonsense.

There's no quiet place to watch the crop grow.

It's so easy to lose track of Jesus.

Should we wonder why he it seems he isn't taking care of us?

- Where was God at 9-11?
- Where was God when Covid swept the globe?
- Where was God when ERCOT forgot to keep the lights on?

God was always here. But, I wonder, "*Where were we?*"

Were we busy minding the crop? *Maybe not.*

Were we caught up in ourselves and our own lives? *Maybe so.*

Living in faith is about living right now.

Away from the racket and noise and nonsense.

St. Christopher's needs to be that quiet place.

We will never know, for sure, what'll happen,

when God plants a crop here. *But God knows.*

Our job is to nurture the seeds that God plants.

Our job is to protect the seedlings from the storms.

Our job is to water God's field of dreams, and

To love whatever and whomever God sends us.

St. Christopher's needs to be the place in Killeen,

where it's safe to plant a crop and to watch it grow.

We'll never be sure, what'll happen when

God plants a crop here. But God knows.

And God will know that we tried.

-AMEN

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<sup>i</sup> And Kern County is really, really big.

<sup>ii</sup> ... and oil. Lot and lots and lots and lots. In 2019, Kern County was ranked the #7 oil-producing county in the nation, yielding 119 million barrels of oil and 129 billion CF of gas. See, U.S. Energy Information Administration data. [https://kernedc.com › wp-content › uploads › 2021/04PDF](https://kernedc.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04PDF)

<sup>iii</sup> From the Greek παραβολή (parabolē), literally "throwing" (bolē) "alongside" (para-).

<sup>iv</sup> Instead of talking directly about “heaven” or God’s “Kingdom”.

<sup>v</sup> Merle was pardoned, by then-California Governor and future President Ronald Reagan, on March 14, 1972.

<sup>vi</sup> Sure enough.

<sup>vii</sup> She was furious when her doctor told her she wasn’t going to live to be 100.

<sup>viii</sup> Excerpted from the poem *Tithonus*, by Lord Alfred Tennyson.

<sup>ix</sup> While many Christians today tend to see ancient Israel as impatiently awaiting the messiah, that may not have been as central to 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism as is believed. But many Jewish people then did believe that Yahweh would one day defeat the forces of darkness and evil that had burdened the world since Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden. While prophets warned of coming devastation, the people were consoled by recalling that God’s faithfulness and mercy, in a “messianic” time rather than a time of a “messiah”.

See, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-12/messianic-expectation-old-testament.html>