

June 17, 2018
Fourth Sunday After Pentecost (Proper 6)
Mark 4:26-34

Have you ever had a song stuck in your head? No matter what else you are doing, it's back there in the recesses of your mind playing and it won't go away. That happens to me when I read our Gospel lesson today.

We have two really nice parables here that we tend to really like. The first one is about how the kingdom of God is like seed that is sown and grows and flourishes. We like it because we can be couch potatoes when it comes to this parable—I mean it even features a guy sleeping! *“The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”*

That's cool. We like that. God does His thing and the kingdom thrives and we're in the kingdom. The second parable is like it. The kingdom is sown a little seed and grows like crazy into a the largest of trees. Again, we can be passive in the whole process. The kingdom, the seed, just does what it does and flourishes.

And there's truth to that. Jesus' parable is echoing what God said centuries before through the prophet Isaiah: *“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”* God's Word and kingdom are going to do what God intends.

But we're real tempted to think that's all we have to know about the kingdom of God. We can lapse into going to church on most Sundays, trying to stay out of serious trouble the rest of the week, giving God a nod now and then in prayer, and trusting the kingdom will just do what the kingdom will do and we're going to be fine. That's why we like these parables—they don't seem to put any demands on us.

But an image from that last parable brings a thought to the back of my mind, like a certain song getting stuck in my head. A song familiar to some of you. A song you probably didn't know had any deep theological significance. It goes like, "A-well-a everybody's heard about the bird bird bird bird B-bird's the word oh well-a bird bird bird Bird is a word oh well-a bird bird bird Well-a bird is the word oh well-a bird bird bird B-bird's the word a-well-a bird bird Well-a bird is a word a-well-a bird bird..."

The birds bug me. In the second parable the little mustard seed *"is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."*

Why do the birds bug me? Because in this very same chapter of Mark, just a few verses earlier, what was it the birds were doing? They were snatching up the seed sown in another parable, and Jesus explained that the seed was the Word sown by God!

I'm not sure if Jesus or Mark planned it that way, but to me, those birds in the branches at the end of the parable remind me that while God's kingdom will most certainly flourish and grow into the ultimate glory He has planned for it, there are nasty forces working against it. And if I get lazy, become a couch potato about my faith, I'm at risk.

The Isaiah verse about God's Word going out and accomplishing God's purposes has a warning just before it too. *"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;*

let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

We are not to be passive couch potatoes in our faith. Seeking our Lord is not a one morning a week thing. It is fantastic, right and proper to be here praising God for His goodness and receiving the gift of salvation gained by Jesus’ death and resurrection in Word and Sacrament. But Jesus freed us from the old Sabbath Day requirements not so we would abide with Him only for an hour or so on Sunday morning, but that we are freed to be His holy possession to revere and serve Him 24/7/365.

So lets silently review our week. Did you open your Bible at all and read a decent chunk of God’s Word? Did you seek to let His will be your guide in your life choices? Did you take time for devotions and prayer...daily? Did you pray the Lord’s Prayer outside of church and really think about what you were saying? Did you have a crisis, and take it to God in prayer? Did you thank God for His daily blessings? Did you seek to love your God and neighbor? Did you honestly try to put repentance into practice by resisting sin, maybe changing behavior? Or did you just kind of let the God who created you and then redeemed you at the cost of His own blood slide for six days?

Couch potato-ing your faith is dangerous. St. Paul writes great stuff about the life we’ve been given in Christ, but he is quite clear: *“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”* He isn’t talking about good works. He is talking about doing a life of faith or not. In that same vein St. James writes, *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”*

Jesus Christ Himself makes clear that the kingdom isn't gained by the complacent and lazy. He said *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."*

The Gospel good news is that you are a couch potato when it comes to God placing you in the kingdom. He has called you by the Gospel. He has baptized you into Christ. He feeds you the bread of life in His body and blood. God's kingdom comes in all His promises fulfilled for you in Christ!

But once the Holy Spirit has brought you to saving faith, this gift is to be received not as a trinket to be pocketed as your key to paradise, but as your greatest good and the driving force of a holy eternal life created new each day and enduring through death into the completion of God's kingdom.

The truth is that God's Word, God's grace, God's love for you should be a song always playing in your heart, soul and mind. When you are tempted toward complacency in the faith and sin you want to hear it playing, "Bird bird bird B-bird's the word." That bird is God's Holy Spirit singing, reminding you that God's kingdom has come in Christ. It is flourishing as God intends, and you are smack dab in the middle of it. You are the saved. You are His baptized. Get off the couch and live it.

Amen.