

Pentecost 4B – Lectionary 11 06/19/2024

Sometimes I don't like the way that the kingdom of God grows. But what is the kingdom of God? It is the place where God reigns or is in charge. I appreciate how Luther it explains it as heavenly and earthly. As people of God, we have one foot in each. Here on earth, we try and practice how we will live in the heavenly kingdom.

Growth in the kingdom of God doesn't happen the way that I would like it to. I often get angry and feel uncomfortable as it grows. It doesn't happen fast enough and then when it does, it is not always what I expected.

In Mark the kingdom of God is described as something mysterious. It is often described as something that does not make sense. It also takes our control out of the mix. Now it is really frustrating.

I have found that I can have everything planned out in my head and then when I try and put it together it doesn't always work. Then when one piece falls into place it is time to move full speed ahead. I have often said to God, Hey what were you thinking?

We can experience this in our individual lives and in groups we are members of or even our church. The place and family in which we gather around God in Jesus Christ. This transition process that we are in is not always easy. There is never a clear road map and in my experience things never fully happen in our time. I then often say to God, Hey what are you up to now?

This is the seventh transition process that I have been involved with and every single one has been different. What I have found, is that God is looking for things to happen before God is ready to say, here is your next pastor. I am not making this up, this is what I have experienced and observed.

The transition process is almost like a trust exercise with God. Are you going to trust that I, meaning God, have things under control? God asks us to deal with things as they occur, when we don't, they keep coming back. I am sure that many of you have experienced this in your own lives. If there is something that is not working, it doesn't go away, it just continues to present itself.

We can keep burying it or face it. In reality as human beings we each have things in our lives that we are called to change in order to be healthier disciples for Jesus. I don't always want to. I can easily volunteer for too many things. Many of us know what that feels like. We don't give ourselves permission enough to say no. Only we ourselves can do that.

This is part of what I am talking about in describing the kingdom of God as something mysterious and not making sense. Those of us who are doers often think if we don't do it, it won't get done. That is true. Either someone will pick it up, if we say no or it won't get done. We often find out it is not the end of the world.

Then there are those of us who want to control how something is done. This is one way you can make sure that no one else may want to do it. In most cases there is no one right way of doing anything. I have learned that if I am not in charge to just go with it. That is not always easy, but it is the healthiest.

In our Gospel lesson today, we have Jesus telling two parables about the kingdom of God. In the first one Jesus is describing the wonders of growth when a seed is scattered on the ground and by the next morning it begins to sprout. The person scattered the seed and while they were sleeping it began to sprout. The person had nothing to do with the growth. Jesus explains that the earth produces of itself. First the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.

When the grain is ripe, at once they go in with the sickle to harvest the grain. We all wish it were that easy. I believe what Jesus might be saying here, yes we have a part in the growth, but we don't have control over it. For those of you who have planted anything, you can prepare the soil, do the planting, water and pull the weeds, but you do not have a guarantee what your harvest will look like. Every year is a different year. Sometimes a decent yield, sometimes not much and other times, what do you do with all of it.

All we can do is what is in our control, preparing the soil, planting the seed, watering and pulling the weeds. Then we wait and see. Sometimes it is frustrating and other times we enjoy our yield. Human nature doesn't do so well with this.

Jesus is describing the kingdom of God. We all have a role to play, but what are not responsible for the growth. As much as we would like to control how things go, the more we find out we don't have control. This is where our anger and frustration come in.

In the next parable, I believe Jesus is trying to give hope. He talks about a mustard seed. Mustard seeds were not the most popular plant. It is the smallest seed, but can grow up to 9 feet. Most likely the Jewish people did not grow this in their garden. Yet, Jesus says that it grows up and becomes the greatest of all the shrubs and puts forth large branches. The birds of the air make nests in its shade.

I wonder if Jesus could be trying to tell us that even when things seem out of control and dark that there is hope that that the kingdom of God can still grow into what God wants. A place where people can come and feel safe, secure, and welcomed. A place where the kingdom of God continues to be truthfully preached.

The kingdom of God is not something that we can just hold on to. The more we try and mold it into what we want, the less it may look like the kingdom that Jesus is describing. When we feel uncomfortable we do try and hold on tighter as this is what we do as human beings.

In all of the transitions that I have been through, each time I have needed to relearn some of this letting go. When I come into a new church I have a plan. I continue to adjust it but sometimes, I have to let it go because as it wasn't God's plan. That frustrates me. But then, I hear these parables today and am reminded, I am not in control. God in Jesus Christ is.

Unfortunately, this desire to be in control and want it our way produces strong feelings. Some of these feelings hurt and cause ripples in our relationships. Then I am reminded by friends that transitions are about journeying together, through joyful times and the frustrating times. When we look back we realize some things could have been done differently and said differently, but we can't go back and redo it. What we can do is realize that we are human beings and feelings can cause us to say and do things that can be received as hurtful. This is when reconciliation is needed

Being a part of the kingdom of God is not easy. There are times in my life that I have thought about taking a vacation from church. What would that look like? We all know people who choose to do this and never have come back. The Bible has stories about God's people being in community. God's guidelines are about how to live in community.

We find that it is not easy. There are people that are difficult to get along with and don't do what we expect them to. We get angry and uncomfortable. In reality, at times it is not fun.

Jesus is saying to us today, God's kingdom is not for the faint of heart. It is not about us running God's kingdom. We are called to be planters and nurturers, but we are not responsible for the harvest. That's God's business.

Jesus is saying, as frustrating as it sometimes is, growth will come. It will not come if we try and control it. I know this, but I have to be reminded. We all have different roles to play at different times in our lives in the kingdom of God.

Jesus challenges us today to trust God with the growth of the kingdom. Every day we are called to submit our control to God in Jesus Christ, and we don't always want to. I know I don't, it means it is not about me.

Paul encourages us in our 2nd lesson to let Christ's love urge us on living and working in the kingdom. Regard no one from a human point of view. When we are

in Christ, we are constantly being renewed, some of the old passes away and the new comes. This is what the kingdom of God looks like.

Let us pray: Gracious God, you call us to live and work in your kingdom. As human beings we often struggle with letting you be in control. We want things to happen our way. When they don't, we get angry and feel uncomfortable. Today in Jesus' parables we have been reminded that you will take care of the growth in the kingdom in your time and not ours. We are sorry for often getting in the way. Today we renew our trust and hope in you as we submit our wills to you and believe that you are growing the kingdom in your time. In Jesus' name. Amen