

## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

June 16, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [Ezekiel 17:22-24](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 1 CW

Second Lesson: [Colossians 1:3-8](#)

Gospel Lesson/Sermon Text: [Mark 4:26-34](#)

### **A Top-Down Faith From the Tiniest Seed Grows the Largest Kingdom GOD'S KINGDOM GROWS**

1. God \_\_\_\_\_ His Kingdom
2. We are \_\_\_\_\_
3. The \_\_\_\_\_ things seem \_\_\_\_\_
4. His Kingdom grows \_\_\_\_\_ our \_\_\_\_\_

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

Do you have a favorite English idiom, a saying? There are a lot of popular ones out there. One of my favorite funny things to watch is this German guy called Flula who actually takes English idioms and he tries to explain them as a foreigner. To someone learning English, they are kind of funny and he doesn't always understand them. I just saw one where someone said "You can say that again!" He said "I just said it. Why do I need to say it again?" One of my favorites is when he talks about shooting fish in a barrel. He says, "If I have the fish, why do I have to put them in a barrel and then shoot them?"

But, what we are going to do today is not just talk about English idioms. I'm going to teach you a Chinese saying, a Chinese idiom. This word (I know you can't read it) is 拔苗助长 (Bá miáo zhù zhǎng), and I'll show a picture to help you understand what it is talking about. 拔苗助长 (Bá miáo zhù zhǎng) means "to pull up a shoot to make it grow." You can see it in the picture here. He is pulling up a plant to make it grow. In order to explain it more, I'm going to show a short video: [Ba Miao Zhu Zhang \(拔苗助长\) - Chinese Idioms #1 \(成语\) \(youtube.com\)](#).



Once upon a time in Ancient China, there was a farmer called, well, we don't know his name, so we'll just call him Farmer Hasty. One summer's day, Farmer Hasty and his young son went and tilled the fields together. At the end of a hard day's toil, Farmer Hasty sowed the seeds and returned home to wait for his harvest to bloom. But our Farmer Hasty, as his name suggests, was a rather over-enthusiastic fellow. He waited and waited and waited for the crops to grow.

One morning an idea suddenly sprang into his head. Without delay, Farmer Hasty went out to the crops and put his plan into action. He pulled up each and every shoot to help them grow. After a morning of hard work, Farmer Hasty returned home a satisfied man. He told his young son how he had helped the crops grow just a little taller. His young son, worried about what his father had just done, hurried down to see what had happened. Alas, he found a field of exposed crops, all killed by the sun's rays.

That's a short little explanation of it. These sayings are called 成语 (Chéng Yǔ). What is fun about these saying is they usually have a story behind them. This story is a man who goes and says "Ugh! My field, my plants aren't growing fast enough. I want to help them! I want to help them grow." So then he goes out into the garden. Can you imagine? You have your tomato plants, or for any of the farmers, you go out there and you have your corn stalks, and you're thinking "I want to make them grow taller and faster!" He gets real proud and excited as he goes home. He says "I got all those plants to grow a little bit taller today!" He goes home to his friend, and his friend is like "Oh oh..." He goes out there and sees all those plants lying there dead.

We have lots of people who either grew up on farms, still do farming, or maybe you work in the garden, and you know that doesn't work very well. But when we think about planting and growing, we know that we sometimes get frustrated with how long planting takes or how it goes. When we look at God's Kingdom in these parables Jesus tells us about today, we sometimes get frustrated or struggle with how God grows His Kingdom. But it's important that we know how God grows His Kingdom so that we don't get frustrated and we understand what is amazing about His Kingdom and how God does great things in His Kingdom. We see **God's Kingdom grows**, but God's Kingdom grows different than we maybe expect.

When we talk here about parables and Jesus speaking in parables (at the end it says that Jesus would speak in parables as much as they could understand. He didn't say anything to them without using a parable), does He do this to deceive or hide? When you hear these two parables, do they need much explanation? Overall, you can understand what He is talking about. Plants grow; the other one, a small seed becoming into a large, large tree. What He is saying here is not that Jesus spoke in parables to deceive people, but actually when you hear a parable (Jesus would often use planting

things that were very prevalent, things that referenced things that many, many people knew), you could remember a simple thing and you could explain a more difficult concept relating to something you know. Like all the farmers out here, all these parables about planting, they can relate to it and understand it. So it wasn't that Jesus used parables to deceive or to hide things but to help us remember and to teach.

We know that's true because so often when Jesus spoke in parables, even sometimes when it's harder for us to understand, we know that the people that didn't like Him understood because often they then got angry after He finished the parable. They understood what the parables meant. We understand what they are and He is teaching us these important lessons today about the Kingdom of God.

As He starts, He says, ***"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."*** The simple message in this parable is that *God grows His Kingdom*. There is this great Kingdom that He is growing and it's not all about us. It's not all about our work. God grows it.

How does He grow that Kingdom? We know that God grows that Kingdom through His Word; through sharing the Gospel, through the Bible, through the Sacraments, through Baptism (which we will see in second service), through the Lord's Supper. As the Gospel goes out, it plants a seed. The Holy Spirit works through that. Then it grows. That simple planting of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit creating faith in us and then producing fruit, it produces a harvest. What type of harvest are we talking about? It could be a harvest of the fruits of the Spirit; us living as a Christian and sharing our faith. As I share that faith, as I have the Spirit living in me, fighting against that sinful nature, I produce a harvest walking in line with the Spirit.

The harvest can also be a picture of the last part; the time when God calls us home. What is interesting here is when the harvest comes. Do we get to decide the day when the plants are all ready? God grows it. God provides the water. God provides the right temperatures and everything for the harvest to be the way it is. That's the way it is in our life. God calls us home. God calls people to His Kingdom when He is ready.

One of the encouragements in this lesson is often, even though God grows His Kingdom, we can be like the Chinese parable. We can become impatient or frustrated with God. We struggle to understand how God is working or why God would work in this way, in the same way you can't just sit there and watch your garden grow. You can't watch the field grow. It takes time. *We are so impatient.* We can get impatient about many things. We can get impatient about how long it might take for someone to hear the Gospel and for that Gospel to take root. You might share over and over again. We

can get impatient with how long an idea might take or how long a process is taking. We can get impatient sometimes with ourselves, when we are struggling with a sin.

One of the biggest struggles with talking about impatience is for us to understand what the Kingdom of God is. We have all sorts of different ideas of the Kingdom of God. This week we had a convention and one of the main papers was on the part of the Lord's Prayer where we say "Thy Kingdom come." It talked all about what it means to pray that God's Kingdom comes. On the way home, one of the members who went to that convention with us said, "I had no idea that just those words about the Kingdom talked about so many things!" Some of the reason we get impatient is because we have the wrong idea of what God's Kingdom is.

God's Kingdom isn't a place. It's in our hearts. It's a spiritual Kingdom, a Kingdom that is created by faith and is worked by God. Whenever God is talking about His Kingdom, He is always talking about the work of God. He said God grows His Kingdom, so the Kingdom is really focused on what God is doing. But what our problem might be and why we are impatient is because of what we think the Kingdom of God is. You might think the Kingdom of God is this country, or even this earthly realm. Yes, God is ruling over, He is guiding things, but His Kingdom is not the United States. His Kingdom is a far greater one than this earthly kingdom, and if I get frustrated and I say "God, why aren't you doing something? This world is getting so evil! People are falling away or people are doing this and believing that," I can get so impatient because I'm thinking about the wrong kingdom. This earthly kingdom, the United States, they can be thrown into a lot of different turmoil, but is God still in control? Yes! Is that His Kingdom? His Kingdom is so much greater than that! His Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom that includes so many more people. We'll look at that. That's what the next parable really talks about.

In the next parable He says, ***"What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."***

Sometimes I think we struggle because we see this seed (this is what Jesus is talking about; this tiny seed) and we say "What can come of that?" If you work in gardens, if you do any planting, you see what great things can come from something small. But in our life, do we always think that way?

In our life, *the small things seem unimportant*. We like flashy. We like big. We build our stadiums bigger and bigger. We need a big school, a big church. The average church size is 100 people in the United States, not just attendance. I think we have more than 100 in church here today. The average church membership is 100 people. So the amount of people on a Sunday may be somewhere between 20 and 60 in the church. Some might say "How can God do something with such a small church?" I think we can

think that way sometimes, too. "We're just a small church. What can we do?" But we're not a small church. A membership of 700 and a school; God has blessed us with so much but we can see and think "We're just small. We can't do a whole lot."

You might see that with your gifts. You might think "Ugh, God hasn't given me that many gifts. God hasn't blessed me with so much. I only can do this or that." God has given you great gifts that can be used for His Kingdom, and when we work together, we can go great things for His Gospel, understanding that small things seem unimportant to us.

What other small things seem unimportant? Often some daily things can seem unimportant. Do you skip eating every day because it's just a small meal? "I don't need to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner. I don't need to eat three times a day. It's just a small, little bit." If you skip that all the time, then it makes a big difference. It's the same thing as being in God's Word; to be doing your daily devotions; to be doing the Bible readings; to have those small conversations with loved ones, with family members, with friends; to bring up Jesus even if it's in a small thing. Jesus forgives you. Those small things make a difference. What happens then is that small little seed grows into a giant mustard tree.

What does that tell us? *His Kingdom grows beyond our expectations.* We would never expect this little thing to happen, but God can make so much more happen. We think about that in His Kingdom as we have this, what maybe we feel is a small church, or I just said this small thing, or you have that friend who you have shared with them over and over again. You shared with them and they are so stubborn or so confrontational that "God could never work in that person." Never think that God can't grow His Kingdom in ways you don't expect. That's exactly what He talked about in Ezekiel. He can take this dry tree and make it grow. God can grow His Kingdom far beyond what we expect. We see this in the world. We might look and see things and they are different than we imagine. We might look at the United States and say Christianity is dying out here and in the world. How is God in control?

At the convention this week, we heard about how many Christians were working around the world. Pretty soon there is going to be in fellowship with us about as many people in the United States as Christians as there are around the world right now. So in the United States, we're training at the seminary maybe about 120 students. Around the world, we are training about 400 pastors. The work that we're doing is in places that you would never imagine: Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and China. These are all places where it's dangerous to share your faith! We think, "If I share this, a friend might condemn me or mock me and say something against me. If I share my faith, what could happen?" We have people around the world who know their life is on the line! So we don't have to be afraid because it's not up us. God is in control. When we share that

message, God will cause it to grow. It might not be in the time that we want, in the ways that we think, but we know that God can cause it to grow beyond our expectations.

We can even think about this merger we are going through. We can struggle to say "What's the timeline going to be?" Can we be impatient? Can we struggle and say "When is it going to go? How is it going to go? What is it actually going to look like?" But I am encouraged that there are many people that are thinking "What great things can happen from this," beyond MY expectations and are saying "What if we do this or this?" They are creating an atmosphere to let God work and say "What can we do for the Kingdom? What can God work through our" (what we call) "little churches to reach more people; to grow His Kingdom?" That's what it's really all about. In our lives, the lives of our church and our school, we want to help God's Kingdom grow.

The assurance we have is that it's not all up to us. God will plant His Kingdom. God will grow it as we share His Word, as He works through the Gospel, and as the Holy Spirit creates faith and strengthens faith. So don't be held back by impatience or by what something might appear to be like. Know that God is working and He can grow things far beyond our expectations, all through our Savior Jesus, who has loved you, redeemed you and forgives us for all those struggles and times we doubt and worry. Our Savior has loved us and plants that fruit in our hearts and faith to help us grow. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.