

**Worship Service for June 13<sup>th</sup>: 3rd Sunday after Pentecost**

- **Old Testament:** Ezekiel 17:22-24
- **New Testament:** Mark 4:26-34
- **Psalms:** Psalm 92:1-4,

**Announcements:**

- We observe a minute of silent for the 215 indigenous children found at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School.

**Sermon Title: Sowing Seeds for the Kingdom!**

Beginning from the ancient times till date people in Israel have hugely engaged in agriculture. Today, agriculture plays a major role in their economy. In ancient Israel, tilling the ground and cattle rearing were the chief employments. Israel's year was divided into six agricultural periods – they had the sowing period, the unripe period, the cold season, harvest time (Pentecost period), summer and sultry period. These periods began with cultivation and ended with the harvest. We can therefore understand why Jesus commonly used agriculture in his parables. He knew that the people could easily relate to it.

In both our Old and New Testament passages, God the Father and Jesus Christ are talking about seeds and planting. Seed in the Bible was used either in relation to one's descendants or crops to be planted. Either way, it all had one significance and that was the fact that seed carried life and it had to be buried in order to bring forth life.

When God was addressing the prophet Ezekiel, the Israelites were in exile in Babylon. When they were captured, King Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah in Jerusalem as a ruler in charge of the people and answerable to him. However, Zedekiah decided to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar with his Israelite army, and they were caught. This caused their ruin, and they were therefore like dead people.

Speaking through His prophet Ezekiel, God promised to send a Messiah to deliver His people and restore their life. This was of course a prophecy alluding to Jesus Christ as the Messiah who would come and save Israel and the rest of the world.

In Mark's gospel, we are presented with the Messiah who has come and who is now performing his ministry on the earth. From Mark 4:1-20, Jesus narrates the parable of the sower. He uses "seed" metaphorically to explain the different ways

in which people receive the Word of God. In our passage of Mark 4:26-34 he compares the Kingdom of God to growing seed and to a mustard seed. In these instances, we are told that the Kingdom of God is like seed that is spread by the sower, and it produces much grain for harvesting. He also alludes the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed which is one of the smallest seeds in the world. It begins with the small seed which is planted and grows to become a big tree which serves as shelter and food for birds of all kinds.

When Christianity started after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the disciples were few in number, as tiny as a mustard seed but Christianity has grown to become one of the fastest growing religions in the world today.

Jesus has called us as believers and sent us to be disciples in the world. His message for us today is that as disciples of Christ who have been called to faithfully proclaim the good news of God's Kingdom, we should not relent. If we faithfully and consistently proclaim the gospel of repentance and forgiveness unto salvation, we can have confidence that it will grow. God's Word is a seed and as we continue to play our part in proclaiming His Word to the world, we can be rest assured that it will grow because the Word of God has life within itself.

We have to seize every opportunity that comes our way wherever we find ourselves to tell others about Jesus. Let us remember that every word of Scripture we share with others is a seed we are sowing in their hearts. They might not believe in that instance and even reject us, but that should not discourage us. When seed is sown, it has to die before it bears fruit. Let us keep praying so that our prayers will water the seed we have planted in the lives of those people. And as we do so, we continue to trust in the Holy Spirit to do his good work in the lives that we sowed in. Sooner or later, by God's mercy and grace those people will come to the knowledge of Christ.

However, we cannot pour from an empty cup. We have to equip ourselves as children of God in order to be able to make disciples of others. The Scripture says *'study and do your best to present yourself to God approved, a workman who has no reason to be ashamed, accurately handling and skillfully teaching the word of truth'* (2 Timothy 2:15). The Bible is our number one go to source for spiritual growth and knowledge. If we don't have light we cannot shine in the darkness. The Psalmist said *'your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path (Psalms 119:105).'*

When we study God's word we should pray for understanding, *'open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law (Psalms 119:18).'* And we should never ignore the place of prayer when we proclaim the gospel to others. The apostle Paul said, 'I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow.' No matter how knowledgeable we are of God's word and how eloquently we deliver it to people, God alone makes that word to grow and bear fruit.

Therefore, we need to water our seeds with prayer so that God can cause growth and increase. We have to bear in mind that as in the parable of the sower which are the first twenty verses of our passage today, there are adverse forces that can cause the word of God that we have sent out not to bear fruit. We, therefore, have to pray that the weapons of the enemy shall not stand and that the people we preach to will hear, accept and be saved.

"This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel, I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches."

God fulfilled this promise in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ who came on earth, suffered and died on the cross for our sins. He resurrected and has now ascended to sit at the right hand of the Father making intercessions for us. May the Holy Spirit help us to fulfil our purpose of making disciples as a church and as individuals. Go forth this day with the ability to invite those birds who will come and make their nest in our church, finding shelter in the shades of its branches. Amen.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, you hold all things in your hands. We may plant seeds, but it is your mysterious power that brings forth the plant. We do our small parts, but you bring growth and new life. Thank you for our place in your purposes. Guide our plans for ministry in the days ahead. Come in your wisdom and plant seeds of your kingdom. Watch over tender new life unfolding and bring it to maturity.

We pray for the troubled places of our world, especially those countries and communities still struggling with COVID-19 and those marked by violence and

injustice. Come in your wisdom and plant seeds of your kingdom. Watch over tender new life unfolding and bring it to maturity.

We pray for our community and province as we rebuild common life and recover from the pandemic. We pray for those seeking work or rebuilding businesses, for those exhausted by months of service, and those still suffering the effects of COVID-19.

We pray for those who feel empty or lonely, who fear the future or mourn the past. We pray for those who suffer pain or grief, and for all whose lives have been on hold during these months of pandemic.

We pray for The Presbyterian Church in Canada, for its courts, committees, staff and agencies, as we come to terms with the decisions that came out of the General Assembly last week. Strengthen our local ministry and mission and help us learn new ways to reach out after the months of distancing and adapting to technological assistance.

God of small seeds and secret growth, we bring our gifts to you, trusting that you will bless them. Use them as seeds of new life in our community and in your world. Grow results we cannot even imagine—within us, among us, because of us and beyond us.

Gracious God, you hold all things in your hand, including us. Keep us open to your Spirit's leading. In all that we do, help us embody the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

### **Benediction**

May we flourish like a palm tree and grow like the cedars of Lebanon; may we remain planted in the house of the Lord, and flourish in the courts of our God. May you still bear fruit in old age and stay fresh and green, proclaiming that, "The Lord is

upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him. And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.