

Mark 4:26-29 God's Church will grow!
Pentecost 4 June 28, 2009

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior...

God the Holy Spirit has given us His Word from Mark 4:26-29

This is the Word of our God to help us grow in truth. Your Word is truth! We pray: Help us that we Your saving Word in faithful hearts may treasure; Let ever that Bread of Life afford new grace in richest measure. Amen.

Dear Friends, in Christ,

Today we're going to talk about growing. In the summer time we see plants growing all around us. Summer is also when families get together for reunions. Anyone with growing children will hear: "My, how they have grown! I can't believe how tall they've gotten!" Can you children take credit for growing? Not really. If your families were tall for generations, you most likely will be tall. If not, that's okay, too. It's genetically how God made you.

As we look at our church we may ask, "Are we growing the way God intended or are we missing something? Is there more that we should be doing?" Those aren't bad questions. But, we must be careful not to try to answer them in ways other than how God has directed. When we are faithfully teaching and living according to God's way

God's Church will grow!

First, what does it mean to grow? We are not just talking about size. If we only wanted numbers of people, we could hire a movie star or a famous musician to make an appearance. That would fill the church! But, using Jesus' illustration of the seeds, it would be like planting weeds instead of productive plants! If the message of the church is centered on people rather than God, there will be no lasting growth. People may become better parents or learn other valuable things, but if that is the only message, they will not grow in Christ.

If we are to grow the way God wants us to, then we must begin with God's message for our hearts. Our sinful nature wants us to remain immature, selfish, and in general ignorant of God and His Word. But, as Christians, we will follow what God's Word states in Ephesians 4, "*[Jesus] prepared God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God...*" (v.12-13) St. Paul pictured a body which is being nourished and cared for. The Christians in Ephesus were to be concerned about other members by encouraging them through worship and God's Word. When that happens, there is spiritual growth, and there is growth in numbers as people outside are invited or are drawn in to hear more about Jesus.

Paul continued in Ephesians to describe Christian maturity. "*Then, we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching.... Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into ...Christ.*" (v.14-15) The first part of growing God's way is with the truths of God's Word. The Holy Spirit will use that word to bring us to faith and to grow in that faith with love and peace in Christ.

Jesus told the parable of planting seeds and how they grew. For us, the seed is God's Word. The Bible states, "*You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and enduring Word of God.*" (1 Peter 1:23) As Christians, we cannot give ourselves spiritual life. Only the Holy Spirit can work that in us. But, by hearing God's Word regularly and by receiving the Lord's Supper we can be sure that the Word will sustain our spiritual life. Before we read or listen we should pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance. A hymn states, "Abide with richest blessings among us, bounteous Lord; let us in grace and wisdom grow daily through Thy Word. (TLH #53 v.4)

Second, we are to trust God to work as He promised. We can't make the church grow spiritually any more than we can give life to a seed. Jesus said in our verses, "*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.” (v.26-27) So, we can trust that as we hear and take God’s Word to heart God’s Church will grow. St. Paul wrote, “*I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.*” (1 Corinthians 3:6-7) The Word of God is powerful enough to accomplish everything God plans.

Trusting in God’s Word does not mean that we should take it for granted any more than a gardener is going to plant seeds in a garden and then not return to them. The garden may need watering, weeding or fertilizing. So, as Christians who value God’s Word, we do not want to stand in the way of the Holy Spirit work. Our sinful habits may try to pull us away from God’s life-giving Word. We need to personally make hearing God’s Word the highest priority for our lives. We should make baptizing and teaching people the highest priority for our church. We all have certain personal weaknesses. We make mistakes. Yet, God the Holy Spirit keeps making us aware of our sins against God. Through His Word he will keep convincing us of our need for Jesus to save us. We were all destined for judgment. But, God sent his Son to take that punishment in our place, to die for sins, and rise as the living Savior. Through this Good News, God convinces us that Christ has saved us forever, and our faith in Him will grow!

Third, God wants His church to keep growing. Jesus described that in our verses, “*As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.*” (v.29) The picture is not just of one plant maturing, but of a field full of plants ready to be harvested. The Holy Spirit has given us a maturing faith so that we might look beyond ourselves and our own needs to the spiritual needs of others. Even though only the Holy Spirit can bring spiritual life to people, God invites us all to take part in the work of His Church. As Christians we should feel honored that God wants us to support His work through our prayers and offerings. We should feel privileged just like the disciples of Jesus that that God considers us as an important part in His plan to reach more people, so He can make His Church grow.

How many people still need to hear and believe in Jesus? The number is in the billions of people around the world. We need to keep praying for those who are lost, wherever they may be. We need to keep supporting the mission outreach of our ELS as they support missions in many areas around the world. God will be giving us opportunities among our family and friends to work one by one. He will take care of adding them to a growing number of people in His Church. There was a story of a boy who was on a beach. A storm had washed up live starfish onto the sand by the 1,000’s. The boy was picking them up one by one and throwing them back into the water. A man walking by said to him, What’s the use? You can’t make a difference to all these starfish. I can’t save them all, but I can save this one and he threw it back into the water. So, God can use us to reach one or two at a time. We can bring someone to baptism so that Jesus washes their sins away. We have the powerful Word about Jesus as our Savior and as we speak about it to others, it will make a difference in our lives and theirs. Let us do as Jesus says and trust in Him. Then, thank God, that for us and through us God’s Church continues to grow! We pray:
Speak, O Lord, Your servant’s listening, to Your Word I now give heed. Life and spirit Your Word bearing, all Your Word is true indeed. Death’s dread power in me is rife, Jesus may Your Word of life. Fill my soul with love’s strong fervor that I cling to You forever. Amen.