

June 16 Sermon. "The Kingdom of God"

Mark 4: 26-34

Themes: We Belong to God, New Perspective on Life, We Need a Pilot

"The Kingdom of God." This phrase is mentioned 14 times in Mark's gospel. "The Kingdom of God," or the "dominion of God" – this is what Jesus came to bring, to show, to teach, to embody. He keeps talking about it, teaching about it, giving examples of it in his actions as he heals people, and keeps offering parables to describe it. "The Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel" – those are the first words that Jesus speaks in Mark's gospel. "The Kingdom of God is like . . ." and he keeps saying this. It's the main message. . . .

The Kingdom of God. The beauty of belonging to God. Psalm 100:3 says it this way, "Know that the Lord, he is God, it is he who made us, and we are His; we are his people, the sheep of the pasture."

- Our greatest desire is to know and be known, to love and be loved, and feel confident that those who know us and love us will be there for us through joy and trouble of life. We are wired for connection.
- All of us come into the world spiritually blind. But the kicker is, we don't know it, which is why we continually do dumb things that hurt ourselves and those around us. We lie, we break our promises, we sin in the darkness, we harbor bitterness, and we pretend to be better than we are. Even after we come to Christ, those patterns of sin stay with us.
- Our value is not determined by how others see us or even ourselves; it is based on what God says about us. We are marked "valuable" by Him. He does not show favoritism, and neither should we. We should view every person valuable and worthy.

The Kingdom of God. The great preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick said that throughout history, the world has used two ways of getting rid of Jesus. The first is by crucifying him – that is what the religious and political leaders tried in the 1st century. The second is to worship him without following him.

Jesus came to inaugurate a new reign – far different from the practical, the selfish, the limited, the sad, the world inclined to divisions and death. Jesus came to inaugurate a world of wholeness, of hospitality, of generosity, of extravagance, of inclusive community, of joy and light. That is why we strive to follow Jesus – We want

to be a part of the in-breaking, the continuing emergence of God's redemptive work in the world.

An ordinary fisherman became the rock on which the church would be built. A dishonest tax collector became a trusted friend and disciple. Outsiders were invited to be leaders. The unclean were restored to fellowship. The hopelessly ill were made well again. An angry Pharisee who persecuted the church became the apostle to the Gentiles. People who heard and believed the good news of the gospel were liberated from the prison of a dark, negative perspective and given instead a perspective of light and possibility through the transforming power and liberating love of God. Good things are possible not because of our own efforts, but because of the redemptive power of God.

So, when Jesus speaks about the Kingdom of God like a grain of mustard seed which is the smallest seed on earth but becomes the greatest of all shrubs, he is inviting us to look at the world with new eyes. In this very brief parable Jesus is saying, "This is the way God does things. God is like a Sower who scatters seeds; it grows into a shrub that provides shelter for the creatures of this world. The Kingdom of God is like this. The initial evidence may be so tiny, but the ultimate results are great."

And more importantly, if you TRUST that this is how God does things, then what will you do?

- You will begin to look for the mustard seeds.
- You will live and look for people and signs of this kingdom with faith, grace, and optimism.
- You will not be too quick to dismiss the small and insignificant.
- You will not give up on yourself, on others, on the church, or even on the world just because you see many signs of sin and brokenness.
- Rather, you will TRUST in God's possibilities even if the evidence is as tiny as a mustard seed.
- And you will strive to align, and keep aligning your life, not with the harsh thinking and cruelty of the world, but with God's gracious, redemptive, life-giving, world-altering plans.
- We do not just worship Jesus. We seek to follow Jesus with how we live our lives, how we love, how we prioritize our time, how we reach out with compassion and care, advocate for justice and peace, participate in the in-breaking of God's Kingdom.

If there is a seed, there is always hope. God is always at work. God never leaves us. God is never out of the picture. God is real and God is good. Keep going. Keep trusting God. Here is my observation:

“We Need a Pilot”

An airplane pilot. I don't ever second guess a pilot when I get on a plane, which I have several times. I have faith the pilot will get me where I need to go and in one piece. Now if I can be so unthinkingly faithful of a human, why couldn't I lay my entire trust in Jesus?!?

Believe me, I picture life as a plane and me as the pilot. I have no clue how to fly, and as I look around, I see the wreckage of a failed attempt. I needed a pilot! Invite Jesus into our life. Let him be our pilot!

That's the difference Jesus Christ makes. We become a “new creation” through the new birth. Suddenly we see all things new. As the song says, “Once I was blind, but now I see.”

We are new but not new all at once! This Kingdom of God. This sense of belonging gives us a new perspective on life.

That brings me back to where we started. All of us come into the world spiritually blind. But the kicker is, we don't know it, which is why we continually do dumb things that hurt ourselves and those around us. We lie, we break our promises, we sin in the darkness, we harbor bitterness, and we pretend to be better than we are. Even after we come to Christ, those patterns of sin stay with us. That explains why Christian's struggle in so many ways.

The issue is not how strongly we believe because our faith wavers and our feelings change. The great question is this: Do we believe Jesus did enough to save us completely? When he died on the cross for our sins, and when he rose from the dead to give us a new life, was that enough? Or do we need to add anything to what Jesus did?

I know we already know the answers. Jesus is enough! His death is so vast, so great, so amazing that there is nothing that you or I could ever do to add to the value of what he did for us. If Jesus is enough, then you and I can sleep well tonight.

God answers our weakness with the strength of his Son. If we are “in Christ,” we are new creations. Crippling fear belongs to the “old things” that have passed away.

Christ came to set us free. Even the strongest Christians (whoever they are) battle sin daily. If we say we don't, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

We all need a spiritual pilot!

If we live in fear, we need a new perspective.
If we judge others according to the flesh, we need a new perspective.
If we stop praying, we need a new perspective.

It's not wrong to pray, "Lord Jesus, you have made me a new creation. Help me to live like it today." That's a prayer God will hear and answer. It means you believe 2 Corinthians 5:17 is true.

God help us to live like new creations because Christ makes all things new.

We seek to TRUST God so much – with our heartaches, with our anxieties and concerns, with our fears and losses, with everything, . . . that we live, love, and serve the work of the Kingdom. That is what we do. That is what Jesus calls us to be about.

And how much does the world need people who really TRUST God, and who live as generous lovers and faithful workers for the Kingdom of God?! Amen.