

### 6.13.21 L11P13 God's Kingdom Grows Without Our Effort

- We live in a world that knows so much more than people in Jesus's day
  - For instance, we know and understand much more about farming
  - Mary's cousin is married to a farmer who has a Master of Divinity degree from Yale, almost a PhD in history from another Ivy league University, but then he found his calling as a dairy farmer
  - And by a farmer, I do not mean a "simple farmer" as if this vocational change was somehow a step down, but he's a fellow who understands the benefit of targeted micro-fertilizers, animal husbandry, long-term weather projections, and he can repair their tractor as well as trouble-shoot their computerized robotic milking machine
- But that WAS NOT farming in Jesus's day
  - In Jesus' day, they didn't really know that much about the germination and sprouting of seeds
  - While they knew how to plant and harvest, everything in between planting and reaping was pretty much a mystery
- So in the first parable in today's gospel reading, Jesus embraces and lifts up the mystery of farming
  - A person sowed some seeds
  - Each day this person would look out and watch the fields
  - He had no idea what made the crop grow, but slowly and surely it did
  - She watched... and waited... and then when it was time, she finally harvested the grain
  - Between sowing and reaping, the people did nothing to make the crop grow, and the growth went on without them
- So it is with the Kingdom of God
  - The Kingdom of God has been planted in this world, and we do not know how or why it grows – we only know that instead of OUR WORK, GOD IS AT WORK growing the Kingdom
  - We may THINK we know what God is up to, but time and time again the Kingdom of God has surprised us

- The Kingdom of God is not OURS – the Kingdom of God is the WORK OF GOD
- At the beginning of his ministry right after he was baptized by John the Baptizer, Jesus proclaimed, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news. [Mark 1:15]”
  - Jesus announced the coming of the Kingdom of God
  - And Jesus in his teaching and healing, his miracles and suffering, his death and his resurrection – in Jesus the Kingdom of God was planted in a world and in a humanity that needed their sinful brokenness to be forgiven and healed, and needed their suffering and dying to be overcome by hope
  - The trust is that we cannot not fix ourselves, we cannot save ourselves, we cannot heal the world with even our best efforts, and we cannot outrun the valley of the shadow of death – but God can... and so Jesus did
- Like the seeds that sprout and grow and the farmer knows not how, God has planted and now is nurturing the Kingdom of God in our midst
- Yet we often forget that the growing Kingdom is God’s work, and so try to either take over God’s Kingdom, or push the Kingdom of God along
  - I you are inside, I don’t know if you can read the title of this magazine beyond the first few rows of pews, but this is one of the most important publications for mainstream American Christianity.
  - It is called, THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY and it calls its readers and the whole church to think critically and live faithfully
  - But the title of the magazine is deeply flawed, and the publishers now know it
  - It was named The Christian Century in the year 1900, when Christian faith was optimistic about the world
    - A new century was beginning
    - Medicine and science were beginning to improve life and expand the boundaries of knowledge
    - New weapons like more powerful explosives, machine guns, and soon the airplane made war almost unthinkable, and there was a hopeful sense

among American Christians that perhaps modern, enlightened people could put the worst of humanity behind us, and live in a world where the Christian Gospel would restrain sin and injustice and bring in peace

- The 1900s The Christian Century – boy were they naïve and wrong!
  - We had the war to end all wars that ended in 1918
  - Then we had Hitler and the holocaust
  - Then the nuclear age split the atom and then fused the atom
  - Long ignored injustice toward Black and Brown people erupted in a civil rights movement that made only modest gains
  - Communism spread its cold cloud over millions of people
  - And on, and on it has gone into a new century that has no illusion, I hope, that from a warming and polluted planet, to disease and hunger, war and terrorism, and simply ugly hate – I hope that from all this, over 120 years after this magazine was given its title, that WE ALL REALIZE THAT WE ARE IN TROUBLE and that NO Century is the Christian century
  - We dare not think, that even with our best actions, that even with our most worthy work, that even with faith deeply planted within us – we dare not think that by our actions we can bring in or improve upon God’s Kingdom that is already growing in the world
- Still, God HAS called us to share the sin-forgiving and life-giving Good News of Jesus Christ crucified and raised
- And Jesus himself, has called us to share his love with others AND to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned – in short to do what Jesus did.
  - But it is still God’s Kingdom, not ours
  - The Kingdom is God’s work, not ours, so we are simply called to be servants of the Kingdom

- We have been called to do what we are told to do, which is to watch... and wait... and TO BE ASSURED AND REASSURED TIME AND TIME AGAIN, THAT DESPITE THE MESS THAT WE HAVE MADE OF THIS WORLD AND ITS PEOPLE... despite that, God is at work, we are called to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in words and actions, the mystery of the Kingdom continues, and God's Kingdom that Jesus began still grows, and we are called to serve that Kingdom with our words and our actions