Text: Mark 4:26-34

**Introduction**

Thinking about the parables for me is always tricky ground. I’m not much of a golfer, but sometimes you are watching say the US Open. And these guys are the absolute best golfers in the world. And you see them chip and it hits close and runs off. And they chip back, and end up back where they started. Or they are staring at a 3 feet put, and leave it a foot outside the hole. And you wonder how they could misread it. That’s the type of thing a complete hack like me does on a course. And yes, it’s the US Open so the course itself it tuned a lot harder. But somehow the best in the world can be fooled. Parables are tricky. They are US Open greens. They aren’t those earthly stories with heavenly meaning that you tell Sunday school kids. Jesus says they are so that people can hear and not understand. But he tells the disciples, to you, I’ll give the meanings. But in the gospels there are only 2-3 three that are explained fully. The rest are left to you and me and the Holy Spirit.

**Text**

I’m going to focus mainly on the first parable today, although given that they are told as something of a cluster, I think they are supposed to help each other. The parable of the mystery of the seed growing. That’s what I call it. It’s only found in Mark’s gospel. These are told after the much more familiar seed and soils parables – which is explained. But not immediately after. It is immediately after the parable that inspires “This little light of mine”. And I rehearse this as walking around the green to get a glimpse of the slope in total.

The first tricky read of the green is thinking about who the sower is. The straight smash it put read of any sower, an owner, or the main character in any parable is that this is Jesus or generically God. But if that was the case here, you’d have to say that God doesn’t know what he’s doing. “it sprouts and grows, and He knows not how.” That the mystery. The making of a mystery might be God, but not cluelessness. God knows what he’s doing. We tend not to.

So if the sower of the soils parable is God, this sower must be understood as something different. It is not a parable of the reception of the seed – the word. But it is a parable of it’s growth. It’s a parable given to the church about the great commission to make disciples, baptizing and teaching. And most importantly, it’s a parable about the messy mysterious muddle of the middle.

**Christology**

There are three givens, three things that will absolutely happen in the parable.

1. Seed will be planted.
2. Something will grow
3. There will be a harvest

The first and the last are known with certainty. A man will go out and scatter seed. This is the mission of the church. More on that in a minute, but the seed is literally Christ. Without the victory of Jesus the church would have nothing to proclaim. She would have no seed. But Christ has been victorious. Satan no longer has the power to charge you. Your sins are forgiven. In Christ eternal life is yours. That is the church’s message. That is the lamp that is to be put on a lampstand and not under a bushel. The church doesn’t hide that message under anything, no. In the light of Christ everything is made manifest. Anything secret is made known. Sin is brought into the light to be forgiven. Shame that would have us hide from God is brought into the open and reconciled by the God who would endure the shame of the cross.

The Word of God will be proclaimed until the end of the age. If we won’t proclaim it, the stones would cry out. There is always enough seed. The love of God in Christ is inexhaustible.

**Eschatological**

And when the Word of God goes out, it does not return empty. It accomplishes what it was sent. There will be a harvest. “When the grain is ripe, at once he put in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

Right now our sins are forgiven. Not yet have we received that resurrection body. Right now the entire creation groans waiting for the revelation of the saints. Those saints are already known to God and not a single one will be lost.

Just as sure as the planting is the reaping. Jesus is the alpha and the omega. He’s secured our beginning. When before time he chose you. And He’s secured our home. As the first born of the dead he has defeated sin, and Satan and death. We shall be reclothed. The mortal swallowed up with immortality.

The beginning and the end are fixed. You are God’s from before time and you are his for eternity.

**Moral**

But that leaves us where we are now. In this messy muddy mysterious middle.

We make plans, and they seem to unwind.

We try living into our baptism, and sin always seems so close.

We raise children in the faith, and they might wander.

We pour our hearts and minds into the great commission, and the church stays the same size. Might even shrink.

We invest in this program, and it does nothing, but this odd thing we tried to kill just keeps growing.

“He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.”

So do we just do nothing? The earth produces by itself. Something will grow. It doesn’t seem to need us.

Two thoughts here. First this is the purest gospel. It doesn’t depend upon us. The seed will be planted. Something will grow. There will be a harvest. Christ has assured all of this. We can’t really, not eternally, not in a way that can’t be redeemed, mess it up. “The earth produces by itself.” Think of it this way. Satan has dedicated all his power and millennia of existence to stopping all of this. And he could do nothing. If the greatest being in all creation could do nothing, do you think we are able to foil God?

We may not be able to understand – “he knows not how” – but the will of God will certainly be done.

What God has done is given us the ability to be a part of his will. In Christ we are made a new creation. In Christ, what we do will last. We might not see it now. But when the grain is ripe we will see it.

And that is the start of the second thought here. “We sleep and rise night and day.” That sounds like fruitful work to me. I think the 2nd parable this one is paired with gives us a glimpse of what that might look like.

The biggest part of that fruitful work is simply sowing the seed. And that seed isn’t some grand thing. The work of the kingdom here is not the power and glory. It is the mustard seed. It this small pungent thing that you can’t kill. It’s the whisper of our victory. It’s the promise the everything works out for the good of those who love him. It’s the knowledge that He is with us all the way. It’s the still small voice. It’s the faith of our faithers. It’s the hope of our mothers. It’s love of God that is made real at exactly the moment we need it. It starts small. It starts with one person and one word.

And those people sleep and rise night and day. Stumbling though all the mud and mystery of this life in the middle. We pray, we plan, we perform, we walk in those good works planned out in advance. We attempt to follow the Spirit. We fall and get back up. We have to return to the first door - repentance. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom. We cry and laugh and wonder and rage.

In other words we see the seeds spout and grow and fill in. And we have no idea. No idea other than it is God’s good plan. Maybe we live in a middle that puts up Cathedrals. Maybe we live in a middle where it is a time to scatter stones. But the promise is that through all this mysterious middle, when it is grown, all the birds of the air can make nests.

**Conclusion**

The Spirit blows when and where He wills. The will of God certainly happens without our prayer. If we do not wish to take part in the work of the church – spreading seed – that is not going to stop the work.

What we will miss is God’s will happening with us. What we will miss is witnessing the mystery. Of how the earth produces, of how the mustard seed gives shade to all.

You want to see the mystery. Keep sleeping and rising in the faith, night and day. Witness the mystery.