

## Multiplying the Kingdom

The thought we begin with this morning is the one we finished with last Sunday. We are talking about what happens when the good seed of God's word meets the good soil of receptive and obedient hearts. You will remember in the Parable of the Sower, that the seed which fell on good soil sprung up, flourished, and brought forth an abundant harvest, some 30, some 60, some 100 times what was sown. But how can this happen through our lives and through our life together as the Fourth Street Church of God? What do we need to know, what do we need to do to be fruitful for the kingdom?

In Mark 4, verses 21-23, Jesus temporarily takes us out of the grain fields and into a private home, even into the kitchen and into the bedroom. And, inside this house, which is lighted by an oil lamp, the resident doesn't light the lamp and then hide it under a bowl. And he certainly isn't going to hide it under his bed--unless, of course, he is very very drunk or on hallucinogenic drugs! There are two reasons this person doesn't hide her lamp under her bed. #1 it would be suicidal: She would set her mattress and her house on fire around her. and #2 it would defeat the purpose of lighting the lamp: Lamps are lighted to glow and to give light to the whole room, not to be covered up so that their light cannot be seen.

Even though Jesus has switched metaphors in going from a grain field into a house, these images are still part of the same sermon, and the meaning is not hidden very deep. The meaning is that good news is for sharing. The good news that brings people into the kingdom of God is not to be wasted and not to be hidden. The light is meant to be shared. Not to share it is foolish; it's like hiding a lamp under a bowl, or worse yet, under your bed.

**The first thing we need to keep in mind if we hope to be a part of multiplying the kingdom of God is that everyone who has received Christ is called to share Him with others.** We are called not to hoard but to share the spiritual treasure we have been given. We need to embrace this mindset. Proverbs 11:30 states, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise." This evangelistic task is stated in the mission

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and vision statements of our church, but it has to become more than that. **Reaching others for the kingdom needs to become our passion.**

Jesus' only elaboration on the Parable about hiding lamps under bowls or beds is found in verses 24-25: "Listen carefully to what you hear! The way you treat others will be the way you will be treated--and even worse. Everyone who has something will be given more. But people who don't have anything will lose what little they have."

In these two verses, Jesus begins to anticipate and to answer some of the questions and fears we have regarding the task of evangelism. Here He tells us the second thing we need to know about kingdom multiplication. **If we hope to be used to multiply the kingdom of God we absolutely have to pay attention to how we treat the people around us.** If we treat them badly they will think badly of us and treat us badly in return. Being rude or inconsiderate to lost people is just as stupid as hiding a lamp under a bed and probably worse. If we are not kind to people we will harden the soil in which we are trying to plant the seed of the good news of Jesus Christ. It's like having the following strategy: "Since we want seeds to grow in some new soil, let's stomp it down really good, pour some poison on it, and add a layer of concrete! Then we will scatter the seed. Is that a good way to plant for the harvest? **I don't think so!**"

From what I can gather, George and Phyllis Heaton, and Kate Prescott were recently visited by the same door-to-door evangelist. The man no doubt was sincere. He wanted to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, at least his version of it. Unfortunately, for him and for his message, he came across as arrogant and judgmental. He insulted his hosts and insulted their churches. Whatever good seeds he sought to sow were wasted because he abused the soil before planting.

Eugene Peterson's translation of verses 23-25 puts it in these terms: "Are you listening to this? Really listening? "Listen carefully to what I am saying—and be wary of the shrewd advice that tells you how to get ahead in the world on your own. Giving,

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not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity. Stinginess impoverishes."

The question is persistent: Are you listening? Really listening? If you are really listening you will hear and you will not hide what you hear, but you will faithfully and graciously share it with others, and when you share it with others graciously you will be given more, you will hear more. But if you hide what you are given and refuse to share it, or if you abuse your trust, you will lose what you have. There will be no harvest, no joy; your life will be unfruitful for the kingdom of God.

So, scatter the seed, let the light of God's love shine through you, give out what God gives you and the more you give it out, the more God will pour back into you. Or, in the words of Luke 6:38: "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." **We are called to plant seeds for the kingdom and to soften the soil with love.**

We are at verse 26: Verses 26-29 say: "Again Jesus said: God's kingdom is like what happens when a farmer scatters seed in a field. The farmer sleeps at night and is up and around during the day. Yet the seeds keep sprouting and growing, and he doesn't understand how. It is the ground that makes the seeds sprout and grow into plants that produce grain. Then when harvest season comes and the grain is ripe, the farmer cuts it with a sickle."

In these verses, Mark brings us right back to the Parable of the Sower, which is a very reliable clue that the verses in between are to be understood in its light. The verses in the middle help us to understand the verses that surround them. In this case, verses 26-29 serve to prevent us from putting too much emphasis on human effort in the building of the kingdom. It seems to me that it is very clear that we do bear some responsibility in this matter. The attitude we take toward the word of God that is given us is very important. Jesus challenges us to hear, to really listen. He also challenges us to share what we have received from Him with others, and to do it graciously.

We must have a choice in these matters, otherwise, why would He bother to instruct and to challenge us? Our attitude and receptiveness toward the word of God and our willingness to share it with love is very important.

On the other hand, and **this is the third thing we need to know in regards to kingdom multiplication, what happens when we receive God's word into our hearts and obey Him by sharing it with others, is a mystery.** The multiplication factor is a mystery. In fact we can't control what God does with the word we share with others. We are called to be willing and obedient instruments in His hand; and, beyond that, its all up to Him. What He does with the word we share is up to Him and up to the other persons who hear God's word through our witness. Oh, we can water that word with our prayers and protect that word by setting a good example of what it means to be Christians, but in the end the end result is not up to us. Paul says in I Corinthians 3:7 "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow." **We are called to share God's word humbly, because "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble."**

So, we have seen that we are called to share the good news of Jesus with others and to do so with kindness and with great humility. Then there is one thing more. We can share the good news of Jesus with others with wonderful expectations. In Mark 4:30-32, Jesus says: "What is God's kingdom like? What story can I use to explain it? It is like what happens when a mustard seed is planted in the ground. It is the smallest seed in all the world. But once it is planted, it grows larger than any garden plant. It even puts out branches that are big enough for birds to nest in its shade."

If you have read the book of Acts or know anything about the history of Christianity, you will know that this is exactly what has happened. The movement that we now call the Church, began very small. First there was Jesus, then Jesus and the twelve, Jesus and the 72, Jesus and 120. Then there were 3000 added in one day. The mustard seed like multiplication of His kingdom, once begun, has continued to spread, and worldwide, it is spreading today at a faster rate than ever before.

All it needs to continue around us is for us to be sensitive and obedient to the opportunities to witness that the Holy Spirit places before us. This is crucial for kingdom multiplication: It's not just a matter of us sharing God's word with others; it's a matter of us sharing God's word in response to the prompting and under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. **The fourth thing we need to know and embrace if we are to be really fruitful for the kingdom is that whatever seeds we plant are to be planted under the immediate direction of the Holy Spirit. Timing and specificity are everything.**

In other words, we must plant the seed of God's word where He directs us to plant it and when He directs us to plant it. This is how the evangelists in the Bible carried out this work. They were led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The seeds they planted were planted by faith. Such seeds were soaked with true "Miracle Grow;" their words, timing, and target audiences were saturated with the presence of God. This is what we need to be used to multiply the kingdom. We need to be walking close enough to the Lord to hear and to obey His direction, then the seeds we plant will be fertile, find fertile soil, and produce a great harvest.

Is anyone listening, really listening? Does anyone hear? We are called to share God's word graciously, humbly, under the direction of, and by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. All who have ears, let them hear!

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Mark 4:21-35

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