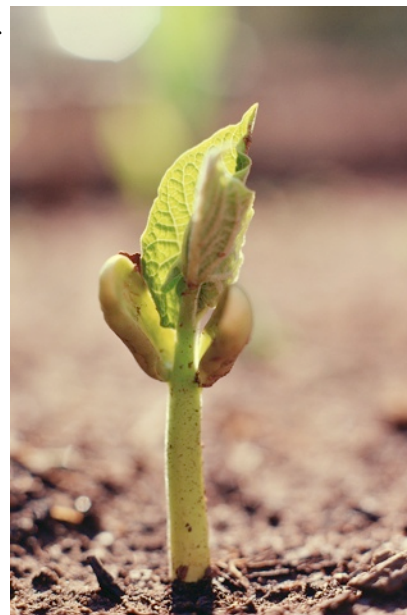


Kingdom Work is a Matter of Faith

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

2 Peter 1:3

Who is it that you pray for when hear the words, “*Hear us, Lord, as we bring you our private*”? Who first comes to mind in those moments of silence? Is it that one relative of yours: a parent, a cousin, a sibling, an uncle or aunt, who’s often on your mind because he/she doesn’t know Christ? Is it that person you work with or go to school with that you might one day be able to talk religion with, but haven’t quite gotten there yet? Is it one of your children about whom you wonder where the fruits of faith are in their lives? Or do you pray for yourself, because you’re worried that your faith is weak and you want it to grow? There’s no rule that tells us for whom to pray during those moments of silence in worship, be it Christians or non-Christians. Each of us has plenty of both Christians and non-Christians in our lives to pray for. Each of us has people in our lives we want to know Christ and grow in Christ. And each of us has opportunities to be a part of helping those people to be brought to faith and grow in faith! If you’re like me, this doesn’t always come easy though? Talking to people about Jesus? Witnessing? Sharing my faith with someone? You might even feel nervous or guilty or just annoyed simply hearing me say it, am I right? Would you like to feel more confident, more competent, more qualified in talking to people about your faith? My friend, Jesus has kernels of confidence for you today in our lesson! He has effective tools that work! So are you ready? Do you trust him? Do you believe he can do it? Do you believe Jesus can equip you with what is necessary for this important work in his kingdom? After all, kingdom work is a matter of faith. Let’s find out more:



The first thing we have to ask about is the kingdom. Most of God’s people in Jesus’ day were waiting for the Messiah to come and usher in a new kingdom. They expected it to be a kingdom of power and might and dominion over all earthly kingdoms and territories, where anyone who rose up against it would be crushed under the fist of the Almighty. God’s people also expected to be members of that glorious and powerful kingdom. But the kingdom Jesus came to bring was not like that. His kingdom is a spiritual one—not an earthly one. Jesus’ kingdom doesn’t take up any physical space, as if it is some territory over which he rules. No, it’s not so much a place, but an activity. And this activity doesn’t take place in this world, but in the hearts of believers. In fact, Jesus himself said as much when he said, “*the kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke 17:21). God’s kingdom is his ruling activity in the hearts of believers. I’ve heard some say instead of calling it his kingdom, we might aptly call it his “kingdom-ing,” his activity of reigning in the hearts of believers. Here’s how Jesus describes God’s *kingdoming* in today’s Gospel:

He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. ²⁹ As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

How does Jesus describe God’s kingdom? Like a man planting seeds in the ground and letting them grow. What does that man know about how the seed actually grows? Not much. Even today, scientists don’t *entirely* understand how seeds turn into plants. Seeds just know what to do. Our Bibles translate by saying,

“All by itself the soil produces grain.” This makes it sound like the soil is doing the work. But this could be better translated by saying, *“Spontaneously the soil produces grain.”* The point of the parable is really to take the focus off the man who did the planting, off of the soil in which he did the planting and to put the focus on the *seed* that he planted. The power of the seed to sprout lies not in the soil, but in the seed itself. What does the seed represent in the parable? It is God’s Word. The power of a person being brought to faith lies not in the person planting the Word or in the person in whom the Word is being planted, but in the planted Word.

So if the seed in the parable is the Word of God, who is the man in the parable? We certainly could see *Jesus* as the Sower who scattered the seeds of God’s Word. The time he spent on this earth was spent planting his powerful Word in the hearts of men. That’s the *kingdoming* activity he was carrying out. But now that activity of the kingdom is ours to carry out as we plant God’s Word in hearts. So the man planting seeds in the parable could also be seen as you. Each of us here as a believer and follower of Christ is charged to carry out the Great Commission—to share our faith.

Now, some of you very well might be thinking now, *“Oh, great, Pastor’s preaching about evangelism again. As if I don’t already feel guilty enough about not sharing my faith enough!”* It’s never been either of your pastors’ intentions to *guilt* anyone into evangelism. We don’t need to. There’s plenty of confidence and competence to go around for all when it comes to witnessing. But the first place to start in gaining confidence in sharing your faith is to first acknowledge the fear you might have of it, to recognize why it makes you uncomfortable, afraid, and hesitant to talk about Jesus with others.

So what does it come down to for you? There’s no one-reason answer for any of us, is there? It’s a variety of reasons why we might hesitate to scatter those gospel seeds that lie so patiently waiting in our pockets. Maybe you’re thinking, *“I’m just not sure what to say. I’m afraid I’ll say something wrong. I don’t want the relationship I have with that person to get weird.”* Maybe you’re tempted to think, *“Well, it’s not going to do any good anyway. That person’s not going to want to hear anything I have to say about faith or Jesus, let alone about sin! Why even bother?”*

But consider this: when a farmer takes a seed in his hand and puts in the ground, how self-conscious is he about his competence to effectively plant that seed? Hardly as self-conscious as most of us tend to be about sharing our faith. Instead of being like the farmer who plants the seeds and lets it do its thing, we wonder and worry and hesitate about all ways we might mess it up! My friends, the devil knows that the main chink in the armor of a Christian is his pervading preoccupation with self. If he can divert our attention away from the power of God’s Word and direct it onto ourselves, he can get us to hesitate and deliberate, to second-guess and second-rate ourselves to the point that we miss an opportunity to let God’s Word do its work.

In Trinity’s preschool class last year, the kids planted little seeds of grass in Styrofoam cups. Their preschool teacher was careful to prepare them in advance, explaining that once they cover their seeds with soil, all you can do is wait for the seed to “wake up.” The seed will only wake up when it’s good and ready and there’s nothing we can do to make it come up when we want it to. The power for the seed to wake up is in the seed. The planter, whether preschooler or professional planter, doesn’t possess the power to make the seed wake up. Nor does the soil. The power is in the seed.

When we put this into spiritual perspective, this is good news! At some time or another, the scattered seed of God's Word was planted in your heart. The person who planted it there acted in faith that by bringing you to the baptismal font the Word and water would do its work. Or perhaps they acted in faith by speaking the Word to you and patiently waiting for faith to wake up. But in either case, the power lay not in the person who planted that seed in you. In either case, they power lay not in *you* causing faith to wake up. Friends, this is good news! Your coming to faith did not depend on you! It couldn't have depended on you, because in your spiritual deadness, you were completely *undependable* to make faith come alive. *Had* it depended on you, faith would never have woken up and the seed of the Word would lie fallow in your heart.

Coming to faith depended on you as much as paying for your sins depended on you. You were completely *undependable* to do that too. Jesus had to do it for you. That payment included all those sins that have to do with our hesitation to share our faith, don't they? For the times we decided not to broach the subject of religion, for our embarrassment to say the name of Jesus in public, for our sinful focus on self—for these byproducts of our sinful nature, we deserved that God would take our lives from us. But for these, Jesus died. When it all depended on him, he pulled through and paid the price.

My friends, it is good news that paying the debt of our sins didn't depend one bit on us. But do you know what that also means? It means that causing faith to come alive in the hearts of *others* does not depend on us either. *We* don't make it happen. When it comes to sharing our faith, we don't have to be self-conscious about what we know or what we're going to say or how it's going to affect someone. No, instead of being self-conscious, we can be seed-conscious. And as a church body sharing God's Word, instead of being we-conscious, we can be Word-conscious. That's where the power is—in the seed, in the Word! Just plant the seed and let it do its thing!

How powerful is that! This is the confidence I told you Jesus had for you today—confidence in the tools God has provided. If you have some work to do at home that requires tools, how confident will you be if the battery in your power-drill is dead or you have the wrong tools altogether? But when your tools are the right ones and they're in perfect working order—how that makes you that so much more confident to tackle the job! God has given us those tools. His powerful Word is the perfect tool for the work of God's kingdom!

That's why kingdom work is a matter of faith! It takes faith, or we might say confidence in God, that he has given you the right tool for the job—his Word—confidence that when you use it, it will have an effect. It doesn't matter how articulate or eloquent you are or are not. It doesn't matter how hardened you think the person is you're witnessing to. It doesn't matter how unqualified you feel for the task. It's doesn't depend on you. It depends on the dependable and powerful seed of God's Word. Whenever you plant the seed of God's Word in the heart of another—that is, whenever you, in your own way, share a truth from the Word, that powerful Word will do its work.

Kingdom work is a matter of faith... faith that God's Word is working in the hands of those who use it. Amen.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!

Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21