

6/14/2009

**Mark 4:26-34**

**26 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."**

**30 Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. 32 Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."**

**33 With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. 34 He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.**

INTRO - About the same time that Kristin Kopperud received her new heart, another tragedy seemed to be happening to some of our friends. Terry and Cherie Dittmer were at St. John in 1993. Terry is a pastor in St. Louis in charge of youth ministry for our church. Late one night Cherie woke Terry up. Her asthma was acting up and her inhaler was not working. Her lips were blue. Terry called 911, but by the time the paramedics arrived she had passed out. When the doctors finally saw her they prepared the family for the worst. They did not expect her to recover. They thought she might be brain dead. It seemed like there was little, if any hope at all.

What do you do when everything seems against you, and there is no end in sight?

I. Though hopeless situations may seem uncommon, this is not an uncommon question. What **do** you do when everything seems against you, and there is no end in sight?

A. Many face what seems overwhelming odds in their lives, in faith.

1. Abraham Lincoln faced what seemed like impossible situations as President during the Civil War when his own party was against him, his cabinet divided, and his generals seemed incompetent.
2. Those facing temptations of substance have faced times when it does not seem possible to resist the behavior that hurts them.
3. God's people, you and I can face repeated sins, such as anger, or an inclination to speak ill of others, or other temptations that we face when time and again we are confronted with situations which could lead to our continued sinning.
4. Sometimes life seems so overwhelming, people don't want to go on any more. They just want to give up. Unfortunately, some have given in, or given up.

B. Jesus faced what seemed like constant, unrelenting opposition and rejection from the people that should have led the welcome for him.

1. Beginning in Mark chapter 1, for most of 2 and ½ chapters up to chapter 4, today's Gospel chapter, we are told of opposition by the Jewish religious leaders,

opposition to Jesus' actions, to his words, to His mission.

2. They opposed him healing a lame man, and a man with a withered hand.
3. They opposed him casting out demons, and walking through a grain field.
4. They said he was demonic, which is what it means when you say "he casts out demons by the prince of demons."
5. Even Jesus' own family seemed not to understand him and wanted him to stop.
6. What do you do . . . when everything seems against you, and there is no end in sight?

II. When faced with overwhelming odds, Jesus told the parables of today's Gospel and others like them.

- A. Jesus told the parable of the sower, and the parable of the wheat and the weeds.
  1. All of these parables were agricultural.
  2. All these parables talked about God's kingdom.
  3. Even when the people of the organized church were working against Jesus, he had a message for His disciples.
- B. The kingdom of God is growing.
  1. It is like a seed planted by a farmer. Even when he is sleeping, the seed is growing and coming to harvest.
  2. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, it seems small, and insignificant, but in the midst of reason to doubt, God's kingdom grows.
- C. In our midst today, God's kingdom grows.
  1. God's word may seem insignificant when read and explained, but God's word produces the fruit of faith which causes ordinary people to do extraordinary acts of love and faith when God works in them.
  2. Baptism may seem like simple water, but in these waters and by His word God brings forgiveness and His Spirit and power and life.
  3. A Savior who is rejected by the leaders, convicted by foreigners, and dies may seem a failure. But this life that seemed insignificant to some of the people of his Jesus' time, has paid for the sins of the world and won victory over sin and death.
- D. You see, in our lives today, when the world seems against the church, when the world seems against God, His kingdom is growing like never before.
  1. There is more persecution of the church than ever before in our world today. Especially in Moslem areas Christians are being persecuted and killed in record numbers.
  2. But, the Church is gaining members and growing in those very areas like never before.
  3. God's kingdom is like a mustard seed, like seed planted and then left. We don't know how, but in God's order of things what seems insignificant, by God's Word and Spirit and power is growing.

III. So, if God's kingdom is growing in spite of the opposition that seems so real to us, we don't give up. Instead we can keep going.

- A. What do you do when everything seems against you, and there is no end in sight?

1. When we face situations that seem to have no hope, we can keep praying. You see, God's kingdom is like a seed that grows even when we don't see it.
  2. When we face the reality of our sin and weakness, we can keep living a life of faith, a life of righteousness, a life of health, a life of love, even in our failure, because in our hearts, the forgiveness and victory of Jesus is growing by His Word and Spirit.
  3. Because God's Word and faith are growing in us we can live a life of service instead of selfishness, of victory instead of defeat. Christ is risen.
- B. When we face death, or temptation, or opposition, we don't give up, we are strengthened to keep going, because God's word and kingdom is growing in us and in our world.

CONCLUSION - When we were in St. Louis we visited the Dittmer family. Cherie had gone from a diagnosis of almost certain death, to a coma, to opening her eyes, to responding with squeezes, to going to therapy, to coming home. The family has no explanation except, when doctors expected the worst, the love and life of God was growing in her. They kept hoping, and praying, and God acted according to their prayers.

What do you do when everything seems against you, and there is no end in sight? You go forward in life and faith, because through Jesus, in our lives, the kingdom of God is growing. Amen!!