

SERMON  
First Lutheran Church  
Aitkin, Minnesota  
June 14, 2015

Mark 4:26-34  
Ezekial 17:22-24  
Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15  
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

### **CHILDREN'S MESSAGE**

Kids, let's do some pretending. Let's pretend that we are a **seed**. Here we are all rolled up in a little ball on the ground. Now pretend that we have grown a little bit and are a **tiny tree** that only has leaves but no branches yet. Our hands can be the **leaves**, close to our bodies. Soon our **trunk** grows a lot and we have lots of leaves and long **branches**. Now pretend that a little bird comes along and builds a **nest** in one of our branches. Here is the nest that we can hold in our hand. Now a **big wind storm** comes along and blows us back and forth. Can we hang onto the little bird in its nest? Now the **wind gets so strong that it blows us over**.

Oh, oh, we forgot to give you **deep, strong roots** to hold you up when the wind storm comes howling through your life. Here is a little tree that my wife, Jennifer, found and asked me to show you. See the little acorn/seed that it started from. See the little trunk that is reaching up toward the sky. See the leaves that are capturing the sunlight to help the tree grow. And what is this? This is the root that connects the tree deeply to the earth.

Jesus tells a story about a tiny mustard seed growing into a very big bush/tree and then it even becomes a safe place for birds to build their nests and raise their families. Jesus says that this is how God's family works too. God plants a little seed of faith in our hearts. Then that faith grows and helps us to trust our lives into God's care. God helps us to grow rooted deeply into God's love. God helps us to grow gifts that bless our lives and the world around us. Then God helps us to live wonderful, joyful lives. And sometimes troubles come, the big storms. But God promises to hang onto us and keep us safe even when things get really bad. Even when we die, God has promised not to let go of us. God promises to bring us home to live with God and all of God's people in heaven forever.

Kids, today your parents and all of these other people here at church are helping you to grow in God's faith family. That's why we send kids to camp too. And when the troubles of life, the storms come, **God will hang onto us** and **we will hang onto God and each other** to be safe no matter what. That's God's promise. Thanks be to God. Amen.

## **ADULT MESSAGE**

I witnessed the entire **spectrum of life** this past Thursday. At 9:30 a.m., I made a **baptism visit** to a beautiful young family with twins. At 11:00 a.m., I attended the **funeral** for fourteen year old **Dawson Vanportfliet** who was killed in a shooting accident. Four hundred people attended at St. James Catholic Church. Thursday afternoon I visited a couple of our **older members** who reside in assisted living and memory care facilities. Thursday at 6:00 p.m. our **church council** met and shared insights about how we can be **God's hands and feet** in and through First Lutheran Church in Aitkin, Minnesota. Finally, after council, I met with a young couple who are preparing for their **wedding day and marriage life together**.

The **young baptism couple** has brought beautiful children into a dangerous, frightening and yet amazing world. They want God to help them. I can't imagine the pain and grief of **Dawson's family**. Nobody needs God's help more than they do. **Our older members** are struggling with the limitations brought on by our later years. They are counting on God to help them. The **young pre-marriage couple** assured me that they will stay married to each other until the day that they die. They want God's help too.

As many of 800 years before the time of Jesus, our **Psalm writer**, in a time of apparent **prosperity and joy**, brought God's Word of promise. **"Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God; they shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be green and succulent; that they may show how upright the Lord is, my rock..."**

Almost 600 years before the time of Jesus, the **prophet Ezekiel** brought God's promise to God's people who were **exiled in a foreign land**, Babylon. Their circumstances couldn't have been much worse. Into troubled lives, Ezekiel spoke the Lord's promise of rescue and life:

1. **"I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar."**
2. **"I myself will plant it."** (x 2)
3. **"Under it, every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind."**
4. **"All the trees will know that I am Lord."**
5. **"I bring low the high tree, make high the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree to flourish."**

## 6. **"I will accomplish it."**

Do you see? God is the One who moves faithfully, certainly, to **rescue**, **give shelter** and to **give life** to God's people in good times and in bad. Do you see? **Our hope always rests in God.**

And then there is our **Gospel** lesson from **Mark 4**. Jesus tells us that the **kingdom of God is like a mustard seed**. Smallest seed becomes greatest shrub and then provides shelter for the birds to come and make nests in its shade.

Do you see it? **God is the original Johnny Appleseed**. Johnny Appleseed traveled through the land planting apple trees wherever he went. God travels everywhere in the world **planting love, life and hope**. First **God plants Jesus**, Savior, in our **world**. Then God plants Jesus, Savior, in our **individual lives**. Then God **plants us** into **God's community of faith** that has existed for thousands of years. Finally, God **plants us** in the **garden of the world** – to grow, prosper and spread more seeds of **love, life and hope**. God plants us to grow and to offer shelter, a place for people to nest securely no matter what life brings their way, **peace and blue skies** or **distress and storm**.

### **Where do you nest?**

- When you lay your head down to rest at night?
- When sickness strikes?
- When monthly expenses exceed income?
- When armored personnel carriers are hit by roadside bombs?
- When chemical dependency has a strangle hold on you?
- When your marriage is in trouble?
- When precious loved ones die?

### **Jesus in these texts tells us:**

- Don't try to go it alone.
- Trust your life, family, home and all that you have and all that you are into the loving embrace of God - every day and forever.
- Then let God move through you to provide encouragement, support, refuge and hope for yourself and for those around you.
- And Jesus promises, **you will grow and flourish!**

**At Dawson's funeral on Thursday**, every parent there was feeling:

- The pain of Dawson's parents,
- Deep love for their own children and grandchildren,
- Fear for all of the dangers that lurk, that could so swiftly steal our kids away...

**The kingdom of God, Jesus says, is like this:**

- Good seed planted by God.
- Roots of faith that grow deeply and securely.
- Boughs that reach out to draw in life and to praise God.
- Shelter for all the other birds and the folks that God loves so much.

We've got three little ones getting baptized amongst us this weekend. We have a family in our town that has been ripped by the greatest loss imaginable. We have older folks who are still longing to be connected to this church and this world in meaningful ways as they live out their later years. We have a young couple that is going to be making a life-long commitment to each other. And we are God's church, God's faith family, who are trying to discern, to seek God's will, for how we should be the people of God in very real and life-giving ways, for each other and for God's world around us. God help us.

The kingdom of God is like a little seed that **grows, prospers and gives life**. God's kingdom gives **shelter, hope and even joy** to any who receive it. Come Lord Jesus and be our guest. **Plant your seeds of faith and life** in us. Every one of us. No matter what happens. Every day. And forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.