

Rooted in Christ  
Pentecost 4  
Daniel Vang  
Mark 4:26-29

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

For the past couple of months, my wife has been growing a couple of herbs in our apartment. I didn't think it'd be possible for her to grow anything worthwhile because of the lack of space but she proved me wrong by doing what she knew best. She first placed soil and seeds into a couple of mason jars then placed them on top of her dresser where the sun's rays could reach them. Over the past couple of months, we've been able to enjoy some fresh basil, rosemary, and scallions with excitement. It turns out all you need is a combination of some good soil and water. With those two things set, the seed will naturally do what it's supposed to do—taking root and growing.

In our reading for today, Jesus shared a parable about the power of the seed and what it is capable of by itself when it thrives. Let me read it again for you all to hear:

“Jesus said, ‘This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—

first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

The seed is the Gospel. And the soil is none other than those who live underneath the reign of God. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, you get the impression that a lot of the people who came before him were eager to hear and see him. And many of them were seemingly receptive but could not grasp much of what he was saying, yet they nonetheless grasped on to him. His teaching and miracles were working within the hearts of people regardless if they knew it themselves, but it would ultimately manifest itself to maturity in trust towards him.

The gospel has this effect on us in that it takes root in our hearts and finds its way to the surface bursting forth from the earth like a little bud on a spring morning proclaiming that it is alive by confessing Jesus is Lord. In Christ alone, you are more alive than you have ever been. You can feel the warmth and glow of the sun. You can see the vast and vivid colors that surround you. But like any little bud, it takes time to grow and to mature. You’ll have to endure through some unfavorable seasons. You will cast doubt on some days and question why all you see are cloudy skies. And you will struggle through some of the fiercest storms you’ll ever have to face. Maybe that’s where you are right now. You’re tired of the constant bombardment of rain that has been beating you down, and you’re ready to let it all go because you can only endure so much.

But for our sake, Jesus has endured all things for you and for me on the cross. There, he was rooted into the earth by the weight of the cross. He was stripped of his beauty and was surrounded by those wanting his demise. He neither felt the warmth and glow of the sun but was enveloped in the darkness and the cold. And when he had died, his blood poured forth on to the earth. For our sake, he remained faithful unto death. But in his resurrection, he burst forth from the tomb and was fully alive. God had risen him from the dead!

In our moments of weakness and doubt, it's tempting to let it all go, but in Jesus' case, he firmly grounded himself to that cross. It was by his death that all things could be made new and grow. And it was in the resurrection that we find his promises to be powerful in and of themselves. The promises of forgiveness, restoration, and eternal life have been given to you by the Holy Spirit whose sole purpose is to sustain and strengthen you throughout all the seasons of your life, even the harshest of seasons. All too often, we have this impression that since Jesus has accomplished what he set out to do--his saving work, his side of the job is done. After that, it's up to us to finish the rest. We'd be mistaken to think that that's all there is to Jesus' work. He has not left us alone to endure through countless storms. In fact, what keeps us standing upright is that he has taken root into our lives. He alone has been our strength all along. We can take great comfort in knowing that we can't hold up our heads high by ourselves, no, but he holds you up by keeping you rooted.

If we look at today's epistle, Paul himself encouraged the Corinthians that though all of this will pass away, God has prepared ahead of time something great for us with Him in which we can be emboldened to live courageously while we are still walking here by faith. Paul is saying that it's the power of the gospel that strengthens the believer to persevere! And if you look around you, you'll notice you're not alone. You are growing alongside others rooted in Christ who have and are facing many of the same trials but are holding onto the same hope as you.

Some years ago, a young guy named Nate and his brothers happened to walk in to my room church. Their father who wasn't a faithful of a church member decided he ought to bring his sons to church to straighten them up. I remember thinking to myself, "New people! That's great." My brother and I, and some of the youth really got to know these guys pretty well. In fact, they integrated themselves into our church family quite well. The brothers were active members.

A couple of years later, I remember seeing one of the brothers walking through the doors at my work place, which was Pizza Hut at the time, and he was beat up pretty bad. His left eye was swollen. His hair was cut shorter than I had ever seen and there stitches on top of his head. His face was bruised, and he had bandages covering over his arms. And one of his younger brothers was banged up just as badly. At the time, my friend Nate didn't say a word about what happened, but he opened up a couple of days later. He shared with me that he and his brothers weren't sporadically beaten, but that they were beaten to near death as a way to cut

ties with their former gang. When Nate told me that, I was shocked! Judging from appearances, I would've never guessed that the brothers were a part of a notorious gang here in Wisconsin. But he went on to tell me this: "You and your brother, and your family. You all have changed us. The Gospel of Jesus has changed us. So we decided it was time we cut ties with our past, and move on forward with Christ." That was humbling. And to think, it all started with the Gospel taking root into their hearts.

Brothers and sisters, it's inevitable that storms will make their way into our lives. For some, such a thing will soon pass away; for others, it will lead them to places they will not want to go. Regardless, Jesus has taken root in your hearts. He has done all the work for us in order to see us grow. And he continues to stand beside with us as we grow. Take consolation in His words of comfort as you endure through harsh seasons. And know that the warmth and glow of the sun is nearby. It will shine brightly upon you reminding you that in Christ alone, you are more alive than you have ever been.

Amen.