

*26He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."*

*30He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."*

*33With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.*

I have a strawberry patch. I weed it, fertilize it, last fall I covered the plants with straw, in the spring I uncovered them to the light. Soon everywhere there were blossoms, then the little berries forming, growing filling. I could hardly wait.

But somewhere between blossom and being sliced on top of my morning cereal my strawberry crop disappeared. One day berries were beginning to turn, a few days later they were gone.

Partly it was the drought. Instead of growing plump and full, berries developed small and seedy. Mostly it was the little rabbits that raced under the nearby raspberry bushes as I approached. Thirsty in a world turned dry they needed my strawberries more than I.

With strawberries on my mind, I wonder at the parable Jesus told, a parable about scattered seed and a harvest that follows.

*The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise, night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.*

Seed gets planted, crop is harvested. It sounds so simple. Jesus plants the kingdom of God and it grows and the harvest will come. And we are like the one who sows the seed, sleeping and rising night and day and not knowing how it is all happening. Then the harvest comes.

In one sense it is that simple. I would not begin to worry about how to make strawberry plants grow strawberries. I don't sit up nights worrying whether I will get bananas from those

plants instead. I don't know how strawberry plants produce strawberries, but then I don't need to know.

So it is with faith. How does the Holy Spirit make believers out of you and me? I don't know. I know that preaching God's word is a planting of the seed. Baptism and Holy Communion are a watering and fertilizing. Hearing God's word is like the sun shining on the leaves maintaining life, producing growth. But we do not know how God comes to rule over a human life which is what God's kingdom is. With this parable Jesus is saying we do not need to know. We need only sleep and rise, night and day, God will bring faith.

“But what about the strawberries?” you ask. “They were planted, yet there was no harvest.”

What if there is drought? What if predators come to devour the fruit? Will God's kingdom still come in your heart and mine?

Probably not.

Growing a garden takes a lot of work. Preparation of soil, weeding, watering, fertilizing, protecting from animals and insects - sometimes growing a crop is like fighting a war. There is no time for sitting back, taking it easy.

We are living in a time of great drought in the church - so many think that they can go without hearing God's word. “Should I go this morning?” they ask. Sometimes they do, many times they don't. Is it any wonder that there is a drying out of their spirit, a shrinking and a shriveling of the fruits of good works?

But they are not here today. So let's not talk about them behind their backs. Let's talk about the drought that is occurring with you and me who are here today.

There is a much more dangerous drought among us. We hear, but we do not hear. God's word comes to us, but we treat this feast as a smorgasbord. We pick and choose what seems appealing.

We like all the words about “*their*” sins. But it is easy to walk right by the food God has prepared for us. We want to hear that we are all right just the way we are. We want to hear that *they* have to change but that God accepts me just the way I am.

God's word is for the changing of our lives. God's word is a hammer and a chisel, forming and shaping you into the image of Christ. When God's word is heard by you, then God's kingdom comes in you and God rules over you and no longer you ruling over yourself.

What should we do? Submit ourselves to God. Especially when God's word says no to the directions our life is heading, we need to hear and to be open to what we hear.

How will it all happen?

The kingdom of God is as if someone should scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.