

## ALIVE AGAIN – BY GOD’S GRACE!

Sermon Text – Mark 4:26-29  
4<sup>th</sup> Sun. a. Pent., Proper 6, Series B  
Sun. & Mon. June 17 & 18, 2018  
Zion Lutheran Church – Beecher, IL  
OT Lesson – Ezekiel 17:22-24  
Epistle Lesson – 2 Cor. 5:1-17  
Gospel – Mark 4:26-34

**[Note: You may also view the sermon being preached at our Sun. 9 AM service. In fact, you are urged to view the sermon as it “came out” much differently! Click on this link to view it: <https://youtu.be/0KSqYektk5M> ]**

Also, there are some statistics quoted toward the end of this sermon. Most of them came from this article: <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-05-024-v>

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our blessed Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. [Amen.]

Today’s sermon is of the type known as a “modern parable.” I’ll tell a story, much as Jesus did, in order to, by God’s grace, expound the Gospel to you, God’s beloved ones.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

It was in the Spring after my first year at the seminary in Ft. Wayne. I was taking a full load of courses in summer school and we were all very busy.

Karen and I had talked off and on about putting out a few tomato plants in our back yard. It was finally decided that we’d do that. She’d buy the plants... and the man standing in front of you would dig up part of the backyard to plant the tomatoes.

Well... within a day or so Karen had done *her* part. The tomatoes were purchased and waiting patiently in their little black seedling containers for someone to plant them! But about that time, I became very busy with my classes.

The tomatoes sat... *and sat... and sat* on the back patio. I purposely left them on the west side of the house. Secretly, I hoped that the hot afternoon sun would put the plants out of their misery *and...* with that... relieve me of my promise to tear up part of the yard in order to plant the tomatoes!

Much to my disappointed surprise, those tomatoes *wouldn’t die!* So I resigned myself that I had to make good on my promise.

There was only one spot in the entire backyard that was suitable. The trouble, though, was that there’d been a small storage shed on that spot at one time. When the shed had been built, apparently some type of chemical similar to *Roundup* had been used to “kill the soil.” Absolutely *nothing* (*not even dandelions!*) was growing in that spot!

I began spading. The soil was clay... and was incredibly hard. It came up in huge chunks. It took me two hours of spading and re-spading to get the soil into small enough clods of dirt where I thought that the plants might have a *chance* to survive.

I must admit... I fully believed that this would be my last effort spent on those plants. You see... I was sure that the tomatoes would die a quick death once I stuck them in that hard clay soil... again... soil that wouldn’t even grow dandelions!

But how wrong I was! Those tomatoes grew to become some of the best plants that we’d ever had. We picked fantastic tomatoes until the frost came that fall!

<pause>

Just as those tomatoes grew out of seemingly impossible circumstances... so does the Gospel *miraculously* grow all *around* us... and *in* us!

You see... we people... in our sinful flesh... are like the dead & infertile clay soil in my old back yard. In our fallen sinful state, we’re incapable of producing *anything* that’s good. In 1 Timothy, Paul claims that *he* is the chief of sinners. However, if we *honestly* consider ourselves... we know that we each compete with Paul for that prize that Paul claims for himself!

Yeah... *each* of us could be ranked as “Olympic contenders” for the gold prize of being the chief of sinners!

Again... when we *honestly* look at what’s to be found in our hearts... we don’t like what we see. In fact... we’re *disgusted* by it! What’s to be found there?

1. Anger...?
2. Jealousy...?
3. Lustful thoughts...?
4. Long-standing grudges...?

Yeah... *disgusting!* We really *are* a sorry lot!

<pause>

But, dear people of God... *that’s* the whole point of today’s parable. The Kingdom of God comes to us directly from God... *without* any assistance from us. In fact, it *has* to do that! St. Paul tells us the truth – before the Holy Spirit comes to us, we “...**were dead in (our) trespasses and sins.**” (Eph. 2:1, ESV)

It’s God... yeah... *it’s God*... Who makes us who’re dead & barren in our sin to now be alive again and fertile soil for Him!

Just as the soil in my backyard had been chemically treated to kill it... so has man been killed through sin. And just as I can’t explain *how* those tomato plants not only lived... but actually *thrived*... neither can anyone fully explain the hidden power of the Word of God.

Just *how* the Word of God can bring peace and purpose in our individual & family lives is beyond every theologian’s ability to explain. We only know that it happens... and that it happens in *God’s* time frame – *not* ours!

<pause>

How does God do this? He does it when He calls us to faith in Christ through the simple, but life-saving, life-giving Baptismal waters. You see, the water in the Baptismal font is mysteriously connected to the Word of God and when those waters splash upon us God washes away our sin and plants faith in Jesus within us.

1. It’s at that very point... that we’re rightly called one of His.
2. It’s at that very point... that we’re re-born as new people... once dead... but now alive in Christ.
3. It’s at that very point... that we believe that Jesus suffered & died on the cross in our place... and rose again.

Truly... we’re incapable of doing anything that would give eternal life to us prior to God calling us to faith!

And so... thanks be to God Who *personally* prepared the soil of our hearts... and planted & nurtured His seeds of faith in Christ in us.

It’s because of *God’s* activity in us that we’re now no longer dead & infertile soil. Using Ezekiel, God tells us of His power to plant, nurture, & make alive: “**I... (He says)... make the dry tree flourish.**” (Ezekiel 17:24)

You see... *it’s God* who does it all. We’re merely the *receivers* of His gracious action! Paul proves this point *even further* when he says: “**No one can say that Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.**” (1 Cor. 12:3, ESV)

<pause>

With Christ in us, we’re fertile soil, bearing fruit. His love *flourishes* through our actions. We naturally and automatically serve God and our neighbor by doing works of mercy & kindness in our day to day lives.

<pause>

Today is Father's Day. You men who are fathers... Enjoy the day... thanking God for the opportunity & privilege to be a dad to those of the next generation.

Also, you fathers... *and, really, even all men*, for that matter...

Much the same way that a baseball manager speaks to the pitcher regarding how to pitch the game... or the way that a football coach goes over the game plan with the quarterback... God has an incredible plan for you!

You fathers... you have an *incredible* influence on your own children!

Oh... it's true. As we mentioned on Mother's Day a few weeks ago... mothers have a unique place & position with their children. They're the primary providers of intimacy, care, & daily nurture. No father – by & large – can replace *that* relationship.

But... the following is *also* equally true. As a child grows in years and begins to look beyond their immediate home... they naturally begin to determine how they'll engage the world "out there."

Statistics show that as a child grows in years... he or she will increasingly look to their *father* to be their role model regarding most of their adult attitudes.

And... statistically... where the father is indifferent, inadequate, or just plain absent from being a faithful worshipper... the children perceive that going to church is only for "women & children." And... they'll respond accordingly – by not going to church at all... **or**... going to church infrequently *at best*.

In short... surveys show that if a father doesn't go to church – regardless of how faithful the mother is – *only 1 child in 50* will become a regular worshipper.

However, if a father goes regularly – regardless of the religious practice of the mother – between 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s & 3/4<sup>th</sup>s of their children will become regular (or... at least *irregular*) churchgoers.

<pause>

Men... *and fathers in particular*... this is your God-given privilege. Think of it... God has placed into your hands a key part of your own children's eternal welfare!

Honor it. Embrace it! It's unique to you *as a man*. No woman can do this task as well as God has equipped *you*!

Certainly, if the father is out of the picture, the mother can *and should* step up to the best of her ability – and God *will* bless that!

Men... fathers... your faithful worship...

1. ...is *essential* to the community of faith.
2. ...it's *vital* to the work of all mothers.
3. And... *and*... it's a factor in the future salvation of our children!

<pause>

We began by talking about my family's tomato patch that produced, much to our great surprise, tomato after tomato out of seemingly dead and infertile soil. In fact, I gave up on it *even before* I planted the tomatoes! For I was *sure* that it was a waste of time and effort.

Thanks be to God that He didn't give up on *us* when we were dead in our sins.

Thanks be to God who saw us not as a waste of time... but as an opportunity to re-claim what was His. He bought us back from being dead in our sins through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Now, as God's people – men & women; young & old – let us each go forward in boldness & confidence. And as we go... may we produce good works that testify to God's action **that made us alive again... by His grace!**

May we joyfully do this until we rest from our labors with Him! In Jesus' name, and for His sake! [Amen.]