**MARK 4:26-34**

**WE DON’T KNOW**

 A seed is planted. You water it. The sun shines on it. You wait. You dig it up to see how it’s doing. Now it’s dead. No, you don’t dig up seeds once you’ve planted them. You wait and let them grow on their own not knowing how they grow.

 Here the seed that’s planted is the Word of God. “With many such parables He spoke the Word to them, as they were able to hear it” (v. 34). I pray that you are able to hear this Word of God.

Our theme is the power and reliability of the Gospel message, and not us unknowing people. As Paul once said, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:6-7). All that need to be done, in fact, all that can be done, is to sow the seed, to proclaim the Word of God, to water the seed, to proclaim the Word of God.

Our parable says that the farmer doesn’t know how the seeds grow, and some farmers may take offense at that. They know about cultivating, fertilizing and spraying for weeds. They know about temperature and moisture content, but what about the DNA, RNA, mRNA, tRNA, and all those other things within the seed, and microbes within the soil, how they all work?

Pastors and Christians alike know about proclaiming the Word of God, but we don’t know how it works in the hearts of those who hear it. We live in a time of the unknowns. A child was baptized, confirmed, and went off to school or work, and hasn’t been seen in any church in years. Parents and grandparents may grieve and worry about their eternal salvation. I grieve over those whom we don’t see here anymore Sunday after Sunday. You may be worrying today about someone near and dear to you.

However, as our text says, we don’t know. The seed of the Word of God has been sown, and some of those whom we worry and pray about may come back to have faith in Jesus again. You don’t know what God is doing, and so after you pray for your loved ones go to sleep and rise the next day, not in worry, but in trust of God.

God is working in people in ways that are beyond our understanding. As God told Isaiah, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (55:8-11).

God will seek, and find and save. He says that “a bruised reed He will not break, and a faintly burning wick He will not quench” (Isaiah 42:3). Think of Nicodemus in the New Testament. We often just think of him at his first appearance in the Gospel of John, and forget about the other two times that he shows up.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee who came to Jesus by night to ask Him some questions, because he was afraid of the other Pharisees finding out that he had some interest in Jesus. That was in John chapter three. Our first impression of Nicodemus could be that of a coward hiding his faith. He could be like any other person whom we don’t see any faith in.

But then in John 7(:50-52) Nicodemus speaks up and defends Jesus among the Pharisees. Nicodemus said, “Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?” His question wasn’t well received, and the other Pharisees replied to him, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.” He experienced opposition and went underground with his faith, and we don’t hear about him or from him again until after Jesus was killed.

After the crucifixion of Jesus “Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away His body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight” – John 19(:38-39).

 Two secret disciples publicly sprout up after Jesus’ crucifixion. You don’t know when a person will come to faith, or reveal their faith that they had been hiding for fear of what other people may think of them. You can see this back-and-forth struggle with faith even with Jesus’ disciples as Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and then told Jesus that He wouldn’t be crucified (Matthew 16:16, 22). He denied that he even knew Jesus. Then he boldly proclaimed that God raised Jesus from the dead and “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:10-12).

 You don’t know how God’s kingdom is growing, but God is growing it. You don’t know the struggles your faith will take you through, or who of your family will come to have faith in Jesus.

 Once when I was visiting my family, which wasn’t a church going family, the Jehovah’s Witnesses showed up. After they left my dad turned to me and said, “I don’t believe any of that”, and then he gave a very clear simple expression of the Gospel. It shocked me that he knew the Christian faith and believed the Christian faith. Your family may some day shock you too, because you don’t know how the Word of God is growing in them.

 However, for many, not knowing is hard. People say things like, “If I only knew such and such about this situation then I would be able to handle it.” We need the space and freedom to not know how God is working, and be able to just trust Him. We need to be able to hold on through the hard times even though we don’t understand everything. And the reason we all need to hold on is because how the first parable ends – “the harvest has come”.

 There is a harvest yet to come. Jesus is coming back. This is the end of the world harvest that Jesus refers to when all people will see the Lord. Then it won’t be time to plant seeds of faith. Then it will be time to harvest the seeds that have grown. When you harvest your crops it doesn’t matter if there are still some seeds under the soil that are yet to sprout. They won’t be harvested. The seeds that have sprouted and grown will be harvested.

 We of the faith will be harvested because Jesus too travels through that time of not knowing from the cross to His return. When speaking of His return Jesus said, “Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” – Mark 13:32.

 For the rest of it Jesus knew, but the people around Him didn’t believe or know how it all could be possible. Jesus said the He would die and rise again on the third day, but how is that possible? Do you understand a resurrection? Do you believe in a resurrection, your resurrection? You don’t need to know and understand how something happens in order to believe that it happened for Jesus, and that it will happen for you.

 When I find myself wondering how, I can even find myself disbelieving that it will happen. So much of our society wants proof and answers to all of their questions before they’ll believe. We too can get infected with that attitude of wanting proof or signs. Jesus said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Then the apostle John wrote, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name” – John 20:29-31.

 Simply put that’s what the Word of God is for. It’s the seed that’s sown into our hearts that grows in ways that you’ll never understand, but it’s sown there so that you may believe that Jesus lived, died, rose, and ascended to heaven so that by God’s power and grace alone you may have life in Jesus’ name. Amen.