

Mark 4:26-41

The Lord of the Harvest and the Storm

Good morning, Church...

It is a joy to be here with you all.

This morning, I am going to call the Ukraine Mission's team up to pray over them...

Please open your Bibles to Mark Chapter 4; we will pick up our verse-by-verse study at verse 26 and finish chapter 4.

I hope you don't mind me taking you back to my garden this morning.

If any of you have grown asparagus, you will know the difficulty of waiting for that crop.

I love that veggie, especially with a good steak, and I loved the idea of going out to my garden to pick them daily.

I didn't realize that you spend the first couple of years focusing on the root system of that crop.

From a seedling, it takes some time; if you can get shoots to plant, the time is reduced to a year.

But it is a patient crop, and in the third or fourth year, I cannot remember, I was finally getting spears... in early Spring.

But in the battle for the right amount of water and the right soil type, I learned the soil needed ash from the fireplace to get those things growing... then the rabbits and insects were drawn to them as well.

After years of preparing the soil and doing everything within my own power, I realized that there comes a moment when there is nothing left for me to do but to trust.

I cannot make that seed germinate. I cannot control what happens under the soil, or nature's dangers... and I could not speed up the harvest.

Life inside that seed is completely beyond any human control.

One of the hardest things was when those spears were finally getting to a place where we could cut them out

in a day or so; a Spring Storm was coming, with hail and heavy downpours.

Those dark clouds rolled over my house, darken the backyard, and when that hail started dropping, all I could think about were those precious asparagus I had waited years to eat.

The winds had our fruit trees almost bent to the ground, as lightning flashed all around; I didn't even have the heart to look at all my hard work.

I shouted up into the sky, "God, why? All those years of hard work?"

Jess came through the door with grocery bags in hand. As she was shaking the hail off her jacket, she heard me talking about those asparagus almost being ready for a couple of days now, and she knew I was defeated, and she pulled asparagus out of the grocery bag and said, "Let's just do it my way, from the store."

It put all the drama in perspective, but I am a philosopher, and I went on a good tangent about how hard a man can prepare the field, but there is so much I cannot control in this life, like the weather.

Every harvest in that backyard depends really on Someone greater than me...

That is exactly where Mark chapter 4 leaves us.

Jesus first tells a parable reminding us that God's Kingdom grows in ways that we cannot explain or control.

The seed grows while the farmer sleeps because God is at work

Then without warning, Mark moves us from a peaceful field to a violent sea.

The same Lord who causes the seed to grow also speaks to the wind and the waves.

In one story, Jesus is Lord of the harvest; in the next, He is Lord of the storm.

Maybe your life, like mine, resonates with all this.

Sometimes we are waiting for God to bring the growth we seek: a marriage, our children, our ministry, our faith.

And other times, we are not in a season of waiting at all; we are in the middle of a dramatic storm.

Mark wants us to know whether we are watching the field or fighting the waves, the same Savior is in control.

Let's pray, and we will get into it.

Jesus starts here in verse 26 with a parable...

Please look at it with me...

Mark 4 verse 26...

The Parable of the Growing Seed

4:26 And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, **27** and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. **28** For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. **29** But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

To get the full picture, we have to maintain the chapter's overall flow.

Remember, Jesus gave the parable of the soils, ending with the description of His true followers, the ones producing fruit many times over.

They received the Word on the good soil of their heart, and it brings forth fruit unto the Kingdom of God.

Jesus then moved on to give the Parable of the Lamp, describing the Christian life as one to be on display for the world to see.

Jesus taught in **John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."**

When we are saved by the Light of the World, Born Again through the Spirit of God, our lives will radiate His Light to the world.

You wouldn't Light a lamp to cover it...

Maybe you are not aware of it, but as I go about life, there is this one thing I marvel at, and you will see it too, if you consider what I am saying.

In the Jesus people, as many of you are, there is a hope that sits behind your eyes... I see it clearly; I see it every time we gather together...

I can spot a Christian in public, because they stand out; there is a Light burning in them...

Maybe you have never considered this, but you are different, you stand out, you shine... I can see it...

In contrast to those who are consumed with the world, their flesh, and the deeds of darkness, you can see emptiness in their eyes...

They have no hope, they have no joy, they have no life...

Just last Wednesday Night, a recent widow in our Church came up and hugged me, and I saw a radiant light in her...

She is enduring pain, heartache unimaginable, but that Light in us burns even in the most hopeless times, because it is not there conditioned upon the circumstances of this world.

It is there, because its source is out of this world, apart from this world...

Church, you stand out; your kids stand out in their schools; they are different, because the Light of the World lives in them...

Jess and I have this picture that contrasts with the day we were getting married, when I was still lost in the

world, and the remnants of our past were still impacting Jess...

And underneath it is only several months, under a year of walking with Jesus; we are unrecognizable and filled with Light...

I wouldn't believe it if we didn't have the picture... Well, maybe I'll show it to you...

Picture #1...

There is a Light burning inside all of you... Let it shine bright before all.

The warning last week was to take heed to what you hear... When you hear the Word, put it into practice and let your Light shine before men that your Father in heaven will be glorified.

Jesus gives a Parable here of the Growing Seed... which is a follow-up, continuing of this thought...

He likens the Kingdom of God to the way a seed grows. It is so very important that we understand here that we are not responsible for making the seed grow.

In reality, I cannot explain the supernatural work of germination, how a dead seed comes to life.

There is a mystery to the whole process, from life and growth to harvest.

It takes incredible faith to be a farmer.

Patience is of the essence.

In the Parable of the Soils, the Lord showed that 75% of the seed scattered was lost on fruitless and unproductive soil.

This is a discouragement to many workers or those who set out in a ministry.

But, here in this parable before us this morning, Jesus reassured them that a harvest would come.

However, the growth was not anything they could control.

As Christians, we are commissioned by the Lord to go out and sow the Seed of the Gospel, but our God is the One who is responsible for growing the Seed.

When Paul was writing to the carnal Christians in Corinth, who were fighting over the influence of spiritual men in their lives, he said:

1 Cor. 3:5-8 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

We are only responsible for faithfully preaching the message entrusted to us... and have no control over how it is received.

If people do not respond, or if pride rises, don't feel guilt or shame over it.

It is God who brings forth any fruit from the labor put forth here in the Kingdom of God.

Think about those times you had led someone to the Lord, and they say, "Man, my mother has been praying for years that this would happen; I need to call her."

Or, “My co-worker was sharing with me over the last few months...”

Maybe, “The church I used to pop into because it was the only safe place in the neighborhood used to teach about Jesus...”

Usually, in that moment, we see that others have already laid the groundwork in their hearts.

We happen to be the ones God brings at the right time to close the deal.

Our responsibility is clearly laid out in the Word...

2 Tim 4:2 Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

Never count anyone out... As a leadership model, we try to set this tone...

We want to give anyone, everyone who comes through those doors a chance to come to Jesus...

We also understand God’s timeline may not be our timeline; there is a growth period in their hearts that has nothing to do with us...

We sow, water, cultivate, and pray!

God is the One who ultimately brings the harvest.

This leads us into the next parable Jesus teaches...

If God is bringing forth that fruit, this is what we can expect...

Verse 30 now...

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

(Matt 13:31,32; Luke 13:18,19)

30 Then He said, "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? **31** *It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; 32 but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade."*

Let's keep the exegetical flow here...

Considering what has been said in the parables before, we need to find our connection to the truth Jesus is trying to bring forth.

There is no explanation for this particular parable in the Gospels.

Jesus here likens the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed.

The smallest seed in Israel at that time...

A person could sow a mustard seed, as small as it is, and the growth could be incredible from that tiny grain.

Hold up mustard seed.

Think in terms of Church history: Jesus started with a small group of men, twelve; then there were 120 in the Upper Room at Pentecost; they were filled with the Holy Spirit and preached the truth.

Then thousands came in as Peter preached the Gospel....

The message began to spread throughout Jerusalem and Samaria at that point, and ultimately to the ends of the world.

Explosive growth took place...

This is the picture we have here in this parable...

The growth was unnatural, even to the point of becoming a tree, whereas a bush or shrub would be expected to form.

So, this abnormally large growth, large enough for birds to perch on the branches, has occurred.

This picture found in this parable gives a two-fold emphasis.

Jesus lays out an encouraging Word, but also a Word of warning.

With this type of unnatural growth comes the warning. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus used this example of birds swooping down and eating the seed off the path.

Jesus Himself gave the meaning of the birds there, showing them as a reference to the devil, an evil influence.

Here is this explosion of church growth, and it makes this unnatural tree, and within this unnatural growth you can expect evil or even satanic workers within the church.

Just look at the church landscape today... So many false churches, denominations, and groups have been formed.

The tree is huge: Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and all the subcategories.

There are even cults, LDS or Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses, and all kinds in between.

There is a satanic influence perched under the Christian banner, as false teaching grows with the expansion of the church.

That is a macro-look; what about the micro-look?

Here, even in the pews today, we have to consider this warning from Jesus, within the local church body.

As the numbers grow at Calvary Old Town, we find so often, within the ranks, there are those here with evil motives.

It is always devastating, but when they are spotted, our elders are quick to act, and they fly out... though they are not always easy to spot.

So, Jesus uses these parables to instruct; look at verse 33 now...

Jesus' Use of Parables

33 And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear *it*. **34** But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.

We need to understand and apply the teachings of Jesus in these parables.

These are important truths to consider as we grow in our walk with the Lord.

As the disciples were given the ability to understand, so too can you understand and apply them today.

So, we will move from these Kingdom Parables and go right into a narrative to learn a very valuable lesson...

Look at verse 35...

Wind and Wave Obey Jesus

(Matt 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25)

35 On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." **36** Now

when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. **37** And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. **38** But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

The disciples here, on the same evening Jesus presented these world-altering teachings, were now instructed to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

Remember the crowds were thick, and Jesus was forced into a boat to give Him preaching space.

There is something very important here to understand, perhaps underline, if you are an “underliner” this morning.

Underline Jesus’s words, “Let us cross over to the other side...”

Jesus didn’t say, “Hey, let’s head out into the water and go for a night fish.”

“He didn’t look up at the sky and say, let’s see if we can make it to the other side; it looks a little stormy tonight.”

These are mostly experienced boatmen; being fishermen, these men would be pretty confident that they could get this Carpenter to His destination.

“It is nice now, how Jesus is finally trusting us for something;” “He needs us to do something for Him;” “Finally, He is recognizing our contributions and skill set.”

However, they will learn a valuable lesson of what really matters.

It is not their skill, their trade, their ability, but the Word of Jesus that will matter.

Jesus is always faithful to His Word.

He has shown these men this many times, and I imagine that as you look at your life this morning, you can see many times when His Word has proven faithful.

Our God cannot be unfaithful to His Word... this is amazing, because people let us down, because there are people who rarely keep their Word...

God's nature is very different from ours.

A person's word means very little today...

We make flippant assurances and promises, but if we break them, we think it is no big deal.

But for God...

Ps 119:160 The entirety of Your word is truth,

So, at Jesus's Word, they jump into the boat, but things start to happen that frighten these professionals... A storm...

And for context's sake, this is not a big fishing boat...

Breaking my wife's rules, and speaking about our Israel trip, which, by the way, we have locked in a date for 2028 and will get prices out soon, January 2028... we will be going back.

But one stop is "The Jesus Boat."

In January of 1986, two Jewish Fishermen found what turned out to be a first-century boat buried in the mud off the Sea of Galilee.

You can see what they preserved of the decaying wood; a typical first-century boat was about 27 feet long and only 7 ½ feet wide.

All of these men are crammed into this small boat in the middle of the giant lake, trying to get to the other side.

This would be something they had done many times, but now something is upon them that has these professional fishermen calling on this Carpenter from Nazareth...

As carpenters, we are pretty used to other trades calling on us for help; we are the masters of the jobsite.

Well, Jesus is not on the jobsite; He is nowhere near where His tradecraft would do them any good.

No, they are not appealing to Jesus the Man, but Jesus the Son of God.

As this windstorm arose... Matthew called it a tempest, which would be a violent storm, making huge waves, that this little boat was not made to maneuver.

We used to get monsoons out in Havasu... and I remember one time, my mom and dad were visiting with some of our Russian friends...

We took them out on some Sea-Doos, and it was not my turn, but my father and the Russian friend were out in the middle of the lake when a monsoon came out of nowhere.

The waves it created were huge, and these new Sea-Doo riders were cast off their seats and into the water...And we were all laughing from the shore as they were trying to get back on...

Until I saw the panic in my dad's face... every time he would come up for a breath, a wave would hit him in the face, the life vest barely keeping him up...

It was a 15-minute struggle, but thankfully, as fast as those storms come in, they blow out... and my dad was able to get the Russian safely on the little marine motorcycle...

Then he pulled himself up, and that was it for the Sea-Dooing... I don't think he has been on one since.

I know what a storm like this can do to what was once a calm lake.

This one on Galilee is so big; these experienced men were pushed past their skill set, and looked to the sleeping Jesus.

This whole picture shows us something about Jesus.

I imagine it is not too far here to reach into our lives...

Maybe today, you have had a storm come upon your life, but this one is different than the little ones you have endured before.

The storm of cancer has blown upon you, as the doctor has laid out a treatment plan you never thought you would have to endure.

What about the tempest of an unexpected death, leaving you lonelier than you have ever felt in your life?

The storm of a Christ-rejecting child, who was raised to know our God.

The winds of a dear brother or sister in Christ, going back to the vomit Jesus saved them from, and you have lost a dear friend, because they are walking a path you cannot follow.

A job loss, bills piling up, so much uncertainty ahead...

An unfaithful spouse, a looming divorce, whatever it is, you are shaken, past anything you have ever felt before...

Jess and I decided early on that we would not lie to our kids, not even if it meant things would be easier for us...

But this week, Freedom, my oldest boy, was going through something pretty painful.

It would have been easy for Jess and me to lie to him about what was happening, to soften the goodbye he was working through...

But he sat there broken-hearted, in reality, and it is hard to watch a ten-year-old feel that kind of pain.

I asked him where he felt the hurt as he was crying, and he said Dad, the pain is right here, as he held his hand over his heart.

I said, "That is pain that comes from real love, man; that is real pain, and there are things in this world that will just break your heart."

I told him his dad, I can't take that pain from him. As a man, he will feel that a lot in his life; it is unavoidable.

I told him, as a parent, the temptation is to shield you from that, but I believe I am called to teach you through the pain.

He buried his head in my chest and cried some more, and I even got a little choked up, because I know the pain he was feeling in that moment was so little compared to things that are before him in this life...

But I made him look at me, and said, “Son, you need to learn to turn to Jesus when that pain comes to your life.”

Out there is a world and a devil that is waiting for my son to try to help him numb pain in different ways.

I don't want to shelter him from the harshness of this world, but I need to teach him who to cling to when it comes.

Because we can fake Christianity in this life, some kids are taught this, to make the outside look good... Make sure people see you reciting your memory verse and worshipping.

People need to see that you love Jesus.

But real faith comes in the storm; it is in the crisis, the turbulent times, that our faith becomes true and relevant.

You cannot fake your way through a storm.

But we can take God at His Word while in the midst of the storm.

You might be in the storm right now, waves crashing over your life...

In those times, pep talks, nice platitudes, or funny sermons just won't cut it in life.

Notice the disciples here are not handling themselves like good put-together Christians; they are a mess, panicked, and they believed they were going to perish...

They were not men of Great Faith.

They thought Jesus didn't even care about them.

They got so zeroed in on the problem, they forgot who was sleeping on the boat.

The trial consumed them...

Their thoughts turned to despair... Their problem spoke louder than the Words Jesus spoke to them: “Let’s go to the other side.”

Focus shifted from the Word of God to their circumstances.

Maybe your circumstances, your pain, your storm have caused panic to ensue in your heart and mind.

And I don’t want to minimize what you are dealing with this morning.

However, the Word of God is our anchor in the storm.

Moses, in speaking to God’s people in the wilderness, said

Deut. 31:6 “Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”

God promised Joshua, in Joshua 1:5 No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.

Young Solomon had just come to the throne, and all the ominous responsibility of overseeing the nation came over him... David reassured Him, in **1 Chronicles 28:20** ... **Be strong and of good courage, and do it; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord God – my God – will be with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you, until you have finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord.**

As God's children, we face uncertainty, pain, and immense storms; we are not immune to this...

But hear God's Word over it all... **Hebrews 13:5** **Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."**

These disciples are at a moment when their own reasoning has overridden Christ's words.

We can say that they are spiritually immature here, but I think it is safe to say we would all be in the same mindset.

Out in the middle of that water, it would be terrifying.

This test reveals their lack of understanding, and in their weak faith, Jesus will show up in a big way...

Look at verse 39...

39 Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. **40** But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How *is it* that you have no faith?" **41** And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

Jesus wakes up, rebukes the wind and sea, "Peace, be still!"

The Greek word means "Be muzzled!"

It is the same word that He used to silence the demon in chapter 1.

Jesus has power not only over the spiritual realm but also over the tangible world we live in, even over nature.

Nature and weather phenomena will continue to wreak havoc on mankind, and there is little to no way we can

stop an angry sea, a tornado, a hurricane, or even an earthquake; we can only sit, hoping nature is kind...

There is so much power in nature... Yet, our God can still it all with a word.

If He can control something so physically mighty...

What about your storm this morning?

Look to Jesus, look to His Word, write His promises out...

My wife will put verses up in the kitchen now and again that are specific to the trial we are facing.

She puts them under her sign that says, "Turns out, this is my circus, and these are my monkeys."

But we must let His Word encourage us...

Your failing marriage, the home being foreclosed on, no employment, that rebellious child, cancer, death, and you can put yours on that list.

None of it is bigger than our God; He has your life in His hands...

Sometimes, we let more prominent voices speak over His Word... and maybe you are having trouble seeing

Him this morning... Maybe the circumstances are closing your eyes to who He is...

When Daisy was much littler, we were here one night, and I was in my office when she had to use the restroom.

She peeked her little head out of my office, and the sanctuary was pitch black, and she was not budging.

I saw the little dance she was doing, and she needed to go...

So, I grabbed her hand, and I knew the pathway here was open, and she said, "Daddy, what if we run into something? What if I fall? I can't see the other side."

I told her, "You don't need to see the other side, just hold my hand."

She stumbled a little on her feet, and I was able to hold her up and steady her back on her feet.

The darkness never left the room, not until we got over there to a light switch, but that little girl made it safely because she trusted the hand she could hold instead of the path she could see.

So often, all we can see is darkness all around... but God has our hand the whole time, and He is calling us to trust Him.

He has a firm grip, church.

Understand, our faith will be tested and tried through the fire of trials, but cling to His Word above it all.

"Remember the asparagus?

Guess what? They survived the storm.

When the sun came up the next morning, I walked out into the garden expecting disappointment. Instead, those hardy little spears were standing there. They could handle far more than I ever imagined.

And before long, Cruz and I were out there almost every day cutting fresh asparagus. Many of them never even made it into the house—we'd be eating them before we reached the back door.

I had spent the night worrying that everything I'd waited years for had been destroyed. But God had sustained what I could not.

I learned that lightning created usable nitrogen... Those nitrogen atoms combined with oxygen form nitrogen

oxides, which dissolve in the rainwater, then those roots under the ground can absorb it.

Something I thought was going to destroy my crop, actually brought insane growth and vitality to those stalks.

Some of you are looking at dark clouds today. The wind is howling. The waves are crashing against your boat. Lightning and thunder all around. You don't know how this story ends.

I can't promise you that your storm will end the way mine did. Scripture doesn't promise that.

But I can promise you this: the same Jesus who was in the boat with His disciples is in your storm today. Whether He calms the storm around you or strengthens you to endure it, He has not left you.

The disciples' greatest miracle wasn't that the sea became calm.

It was that the Son of God was in the boat with them.

He is still Lord of the harvest.

He is still Lord of the storm.

And because He is Lord, you can trust Him.

Even this storm is not outside God's sovereign purposes...

Stick it out, trust God, and watch what He does through you.

Amen.

Let's pray...