

"LOOKING UP IN FAITH"
June 16, 1991

TEXT: Mark 4:26 "And he said, 'The Kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow he knows not how.'"

When a seed is planted in the ground, at first nothing seems to happen. There is no crash of thunder. No trumpets sound. No drums roll. And we can watch that piece of ground for hours but nothing seems to change. Yet changes are taking place just the same --even though we can not see them. The spark of life which God placed in that seed begins to grow. First roots appear. Then a tiny stalk, makes its way toward the surface. And finally, in God's good time, there is a full grown plant --with seeds of its own for the harvest.

In this morning's scripture, Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is like that. He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how." (Mark 4:26-27)

You see, it is not the farmer's job to make seeds grow. He plants them. He feeds them. He clears away the weeds. But he can not make seeds grow. They grow "he knows not how." But he does know this. Nothing will happen unless he plants the seed. And, if he is faithful in his planting, sooner or later there will be a harvest.

We need to be reminded of that now and then. Years ago, a famous Scottish missionary named Robert Moffat returned home from Africa to recruit others to help in his work. One cold wintry night, after fighting through the snow to a little country church, he was disappointed to find that only a handful of women were there to hear his message. He appreciated their interest, of course, but he knew that, in those days, only men could undertake the task he had in mind. And he left that church thinking his evening had been wasted.

But God works in wondrous and mysterious ways. And, while no one volunteered that evening, one person had been deeply moved, a young lad who, all unseen, had pumped the bellows for the organ. That little boy promised God that one day he would answer Moffat's call. And answer it he did. For his name was David Livingston! And all of Africa was blessed by Dr. Livingston's ministry there.

So, you see, we never know what God can do if we just plant a seed. Too often, however, we look at the world's great problems and say to ourselves, "I'm only one person. What can I do?" Well, perhaps not much. But one thing we can do. One crucial thing --without which nothing ever happens. We can plant a seed and trust in God to make it grow.

Somewhere --I do not remember where-- I read about a little girl in Philadelphia who very much wanted to go to Sunday School. But the only Sunday School close to her house was already overcrowded and could not take any more children without enlarging its building.

She was only one little girl, but she did not let that stop her. Without telling anyone, she began to save her pennies. Even her parents did not know what she was doing. Then, one day, she got sick and, after a while, she died. And, when her parents went through her things, they found her meager savings in a dresser drawer along with a note which said, "For the Temple Sunday School so that more of us can go."

Her parents took those pennies and the little girl's note to the man in charge of the Sunday School. And he gave it to a friend of his, a very famous speaker named Russell H. Conwell. In city after city, wherever Conwell went, he told the story of that little girl. Soon other children began to give their pennies, too. And, as the money came in, the Sunday School grew. In time, it became a regular school and then a college. And today Temple University stands as God's answer to the question, "What can one person do?"

Jesus said of faith, "It is like a grain of mustard seed which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all seeds on earth, yet 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." What can we do? We can plant a seed, looking up in faith that God will make it grow.

Sixteen years ago, in 1975, another of God's faithful children did just that. A Swedish nurse named Majken Broby read about a terrible hurricane which had devastated the little Central American country of Honduras. And she went there to see what she could do. The need she found was overwhelming, far greater than her limited resources. But she did what she could.

She planted a seed, beginning her struggle against death and disease by installing a pump --a Briggs and Stratton pump from Milwaukee-- so that poor Honduran peasants, for the first time in their lives, had pure water to drink.

And, as the years passed, she planted other seeds as well: houses, schools, churches --and a tiny clinic to supply the only available medical care for twenty-five thousand people. But she dreamed of a larger clinic. A place which could be used not only for treatment but also for classes. Classes in hygiene and

nutrition so the Hondurans --and especially the children-- would not keep getting sick again and again.

In the summer of 1987, at our national convention in Chicago, I heard her talk about that dream. And I believed in my heart that the people of this church would respond if they only knew about the need. So I came back to Wauwatosa, and that fall I shared her story, first with our Board of Benevolence and then with the Church Council. Most of you know what happened. In January of 1988, at our annual meeting this church voted to raise thirty thousand dollars to build that clinic.

And raise it we did. In fact, we raised thirty-five thousand dollars. And, when Honduran inflation increased the cost to forty thousand dollars, we raised that too.

Then a wonderful thing happened. As word began to get around that the clinic was being built, Christians in Sweden sent medical equipment. Our Congregational Church in Derry, New Hampshire, gave money to hire a doctor. Our National Association of Congregational Christian Churches sent two thousand dollars for shipping and handling, and the Christian Medical Association gave thousands of dollars worth of medicine. Enough to treat five thousand people.

In March of this year the clinic opened its doors to the poor peasants of Honduras. And the people of Rivera Hernandez no longer have to watch their children get sick and their old people die for lack of medical care. If you have not already done so, I urge you to stop by the Friendship Lounge following the service to have a cup of coffee and look at some slides which show the clinic in action.

Of course, the need is still great. There are almost fifty thousand people there now, and one part-time doctor can not possibly take care of them all. But a start has been made, thanks to your generosity. Because you cared, there is now a place where those people can not only be made well, but where they can be taught to boil their water and not to walk through parasite-infested puddles so they do not get sick in the first place. And who knows what else God may do with this seed which you have planted?

In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew we read: "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'" (Matthew 25:37-40)

Let us not waste time and energy worrying about the things we can not do. Let us do what we can and trust that God will make that be enough.