

Sermon March 7, 2010

Grow! Series

Hear

Mark 4:3-20

Summary: Growing always has a starting point. When it comes to letting God grow His Presence and Power in our lives, that starting point can be summed up in one word: Hear. Unless we truly listen to what God is telling us, we will never even begin the process of transformation to become more like Jesus.

I. Tomatoes, Anyone?

A. The Power of Multiplication

- 1. Anybody know how much a tomato seed weighs?**
 - a) A packet with 20 seeds weighs a whopping 100 milligrams.**
 - b) A single seed weights 5 milligrams.**
 - c) An ounce of tomato seeds will produce 9000 plants!**
- 2. Anybody know how many pounds of tomatoes you can grow from just one plant?**
 - a) Estimates range anywhere from 10 pounds to 55 pounds.**

b) A good average would be in the 20 to 25 pound range – if you take really good care of your plant.

c) Not bad: from 5 milligrams to 13.6 kilograms in just one generation.

3. Such is the Power of Multiplication that God built into every living thing He created.

B. Just like the Kingdom of God

1. Jesus tells us that when God sets out to grow His Kingdom in us He follows the same process that we employ when we plant that .005 gram tomato seed.

2. He sets out the Kingdom Process by telling a 4 part gardening story:

a) Mark 4:3 NIV “Listen, a farmer went out to sow his seed.

b) Mark 4:4 NIV “As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

c) Mark 4:5 NIV “Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.

d) Mark 4:6 NIV “But when the sun came up the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

e) Mark 4:7 NIV “Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.

f) Mark 4:8 NIV “Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.”

3. So what makes the growing happen: the farmer or the seed?

- a) **Jesus' little story confronts us with 2 realities.**
- b) **On the one hand, the work of growing is something that only the seed can do.**
- c) **But on the other hand, the success or failure of the project has very much to do with how much effort the farmer is willing to put into his garden.**

C. Kingdom Process

1. **So what does a gardening story tell us about God growing something new in our lives?**
2. **It's not magic!**
 - a) **Think "Process."**
 - b) **There is no magic formula.**
 - c) **There is nothing automatic about what God is doing.**
3. **It's not a passive process**
 - a) **There is nothing that we can do to make ourselves Christ-like.**
 - b) **But there are all sorts of things that we can do to prevent Christ from forming His character in us.**
 - c) **Just like the first 3 soils, we can stop the growing process by failing to cooperate with what God is doing.**
4. **It is a multiplication process that will exceed our wildest dreams.**
 - a) **If one tiny tomato seed – weighing 5 milligrams – can produce 30 pounds of tomatoes, just imagine what God can do with you!**

b) He can turn a season of personal growth and transformation into a lifetime of fruitfulness which in turn can touch the lives of others across generations.

c) He can take a rocky, weedy, beaten-down life and grow a whole person who will live forever in His Presence.

II. Stage One: Hear

A. The Starting Point

1. So important is this parable for our understanding of how God brings His Kingdom into our lives, that Jesus takes the trouble to explain its meaning.

2. The First Soil – that of the hard-beaten path – presents the first obstacle to having God grow His Kingdom in our lives:

a) Mark 4:14 NIV “The farmer sows the word.

b) Mark 4:15 NIV “Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.”

3. A tiny tomato seed can never produce a single tomato unless it is given a chance to grow; the same is true with what God wants to plant in us.

B. The First Opportunity

1. Paul McCartney’s “Yesterday” has the most cover versions of any song ever written – it was performed over 7 million times in the 20th century – but it never would have happened if McCartney had not paid attention to a dream:

The Beatles were in London in 1965 filming *Help!* and McCartney was staying in a small attic room of his family's house on Wimpole Street. One morning, in a dream he heard a classical string ensemble playing, and, as McCartney tells it:

"I woke up with a lovely tune in my head. I thought, 'That's great, I wonder what that is?' There was an upright piano next to me, to the right of the bed by the

window. I got out of bed, sat at the piano, found G, found F sharp minor 7th -- and that leads you through then to B to E minor, and finally back to E. It all leads forward logically. I liked the melody a lot, but because I'd dreamed it, I couldn't believe I'd written it. I thought, 'No, I've never written anything like this before.' **But I had the tune, which was the most magic thing!"**

2. Every new thing that God wants to grow in your life starts with Him speaking to you in some way – planting a thought, a dream, a goal, a correction, a way to bless someone, a way to make our world more like His Kingdom.

3. Is it any wonder that Jesus began this story of the gardener and the 4 soils with the command: “Listen!” and ended it with the command: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

4. Paul stresses just how important it is that we hear what God is saying when he writes:

a) Romans 10:14 NIV How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?

C. The First Obstacle

1. I wonder how many “songs” have come to us that we never bothered to write down?

2. I wonder how many times God has tried to get our attention but only got our Voicemail?

3. Obstacle or Opportunity?

a) It’s up to us.

b) Will we take the time to let God speak to us – to plant His Word in our minds and hearts?

c) Or will we let the busy and the ordinary harden us to the new thing that He wants to do?

III. Taking Time to Listen

A. Path or Plowed Ground?

1. A path is a perfect symbol for the status quo and resistance to change.

a) When we pave a parking lot or a new highway we are doing our best to ensure that this particular part of the planet doesn't change anymore.

b) Nothing will grow in what was once a field or forest.

c) Nothing else will be built on this land.

d) It will stay what it is forever.

2. So what about the paved-over places in our lives?

a) Is it possible that there are entire areas of our lives that we never want to change?

b) Is it possible that there are areas of our lives that we never expect to change?

3. Imagine the uproar if someone announced that a rich vein of pure gold had been discovered running right under Interstate 89!

a) You think removing the rock ledges from the median strip was a big deal?

b) Imagine the commotion that would arise if someone proposed moving both lanes of the interstate to a new location!

c) Change is painful – even if the reward is fantastic.

B. "You have a message."

1. If God speaks to you, you can be sure that He plans to introduce some sort of change.

a) He plans to grow something NEW in your life.

b) He plans to help you get rid of paved areas, areas that you may have given up on, and turn them into fruitful places for His Kingdom.

2. So how does God talk to us?

- a) God speaks to us when we read His Word and allow the Holy Spirit to apply something that we have read to our lives.
- b) God speaks to us through our personal time with Him.
- c) God speaks to us through others.
- d) God speaks to us through our circumstances.

3. When these 4 ways of hearing God line up, you can be pretty sure that God is sending you a message – a seed that will grow a powerful change in your life.

C. Taking Time to Listen

1. During the next week I'm asking that you set aside time to listen to what God is offering to grow in your life.

2. A good starting point is found in Paul's list of the Fruits of the Spirit; these are aspects of a godly character that God does not GIVE to us, but promises to GROW IN US through the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives:

a) Galatians 5:22 NIV But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

b) Galatians 5:23 NIV gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

3. If you are unsure where to start, would you take time this week to let the Holy Spirit focus your attention on at least ONE of these 9 fruits of the Spirit?

a) Think about your circumstances – is there any one of these 9 things that you need more than ever?

b) Think about your past – when you look back at your life, has the lack of one of these 9 fruits been a perennial problem?

c) What new thing could God do in your life if even ONE of these fruits was present?