

**Behold, the grace and peace we have through the Word of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.**

This morning we consider a brief parable of our Lord as we find it in:

**NIV Mark 4:26-29** He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 28 All by itself the soil produces grain-- first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. 29 As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

These are the words of God. In the Name of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Harvest, dear Fellow Redeemed.

Back in the 1950's, scientists and engineers predicted that by the dawn of the 21st century, America would be a completely automated society. All of the common work of day-to-day life would be accomplished automatically, without people ever having to lift a finger. Every unpleasant household chore would be taken care of, not by people, but by robots. Obviously, that never quite happened. But if you stop and think about it, a lot of those early predictions of automation have come true. We now have automatic machines to wash our dishes, cook our food, clean our clothes and heat our homes. How many useful functions does the personal computer carry out for us, much of it automatically, without our ever having to touch a key. You can now buy a device called a "Roomba," a disk-shaped robot that hides under your couch and comes out at prescribed intervals to vacuum your carpet. You don't even have to be home – it's all automatic!

Of course, I'm using the term "automatic" rather loosely. None of those devices I mentioned are truly automatic. For example, humans have to program the computer. Humans have to set the oven, load the dishwasher and adjust the thermostat on the furnace. To be truly automatic, a thing would have to be completely self-contained, carrying out its work effectively without any human input whatsoever. In fact, that's the exact meaning of the Greek adjective *automate*, from which our English word "automatic" is derived. Not coincidentally, that same Greek word occurs in our text for today. It's in a parable Jesus told to illustrate the fact that there is one thing that does work all by itself, with no help needed from man. That's the Word of God! That's why our theme this morning is:

### **THE WORD OF GOD IS AUTOMATIC**

- I. All by itself, it makes faith sprout.
- II. All by itself, it makes faith grow.
- III. All by itself, it ripens faith for the harvest.

This text occurs among a series of parables Jesus told about the kingdom of God, or in other words, how a person becomes a believer. Each parable focuses on a different aspect of this miraculous transformation from spiritual death to spiritual life. Today's text makes a single point: the life is in the Word. The new spiritual life that sprouts and grows in a Christian is completely contained within the Gospel – that Gospel that they hear with their ears and believe with their hearts. It comes from nowhere else. That's why you could say that **THE WORD OF GOD IS AUTOMATIC**. In the first place, because:

#### **1. All by itself, it makes faith sprout.**

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Jesus said, **said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.** The characters in the parable are pretty easy to identify. The seed is the Word of God. The earth in which the seed is sown are the hearts of men. The sower, of course, is Christ, though He uses the preachers

of the Gospel to do His sowing. Now, we don't know how seeds work. A Christian biology professor stood before his college class one day and held up two objects. "In my left hand," he said, "is a seed from a bean plant; in my right a replica I created in the laboratory. They are exactly the same size, weight, color, and chemical composition. There's only one difference – when I put them in the ground, the one God made will sprout, and the one I made will not." The miracle of how a seed germinates and sprouts remains nearly as much a mystery now as it was in the days of Christ. Scientists can't explain it, and they cannot reproduce it. Thankfully, God's creation does not cease to function because we can't understand it.

Neither does God's Word. The Word works, even though we can't see how. That's why the growth of a seed is such a great analogy for how the Word of God works in a person's heart to create faith. A seed has the new life completely encapsulated in itself, and so does the Word. Scripture says, ***Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. – Rom 10:17.***

Without the Word, nothing can happen. That professor's fake seed wouldn't sprout no matter how fertile the soil, or matter how much rain and sunshine it got. But the true seed will sprout, and the same thing's true with the Word of God. It doesn't matter the condition of the human heart into which the Word is sown (in fact, before the Word gets there, the condition is always the same – "dead in trespasses and sins.") But **THE WORD OF GOD IS AUTOMATIC**. It carries within itself the power to create faith, to instill spiritual life in a heart formerly dead in sin. That's why it's often called the "Word of life" in the Bible, or "the Word which lives." Praise God, that's how life came to be in your heart. Maybe the Word was first implanted as a child, at your baptism. Or maybe it was when you were older, when you read the Gospel, or you heard it preached. Maybe it was when a friend shared his faith with you that the Gospel was first planted in your heart. Someone said to you, "Hey, I'm a sinner too! But God sent Jesus to save sinners like us! God gave His only Son into death, so that our sins could be covered forever, and we could have eternal life!" However it happened, that seed was implanted, and it started to grow. That's why Peter could say, ***"You have been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever." – I Pet 1:23.*** That's how faith starts. But where does it go from there? Turns out the development of faith is just as mysterious as its origin, at least from our perspective. But the cause is the same: the life is in the Word. **THE WORD OF GOD IS AUTOMATIC**, because:

## **2. All by itself, it makes faith grow.**

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In the parable, Jesus goes on to speak about how the growing plant matures: **28 All by itself the soil produces grain-- first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.** Once again He emphasizes by itself (there's that word automate, by the way). Once the Word is planted, and a believer is created, everything that happens to nurture and develop faith in that believer is a result solely of the Word.

Unfortunately, this is counter-intuitive to our human way of thinking. A lot of people don't trust the Word. They think that human effort, and human cleverness, is necessary for the kingdom of God to grow. And if you don't believe that, then you've never heard of the Church Growth Movement. It's a whole new industry in America. Their philosophy is this: in order for growth to occur in the church, we have to be very clever. We have to use the latest marketing techniques. We have to target certain demographic groups – especially young people – and minister not to their real needs, but to their "felt needs" – what they think they need to hear. We have to make our church music similar to the music on the radio. We have to tailor our preaching to what they want to hear: usually a lot less doctrine and a lot more feeling and emotion. And if you don't do that, the church won't grow.

But is that how growth occurs, in the human heart or in the church? Is that the way to engender faith? Because let's remember, faith is the goal here. Not big fancy buildings or thousands of members. Luther once said, "God our Father has made all things depend on faith so that whoever has faith will have everything, and whoever does not have faith will have nothing." And the methods of church growth have nothing to do with faith. Those things aren't the seed. The seed is the Word of God, and **THE WORD OF GOD IS**

**AUTOMATIC.** The life – the life that makes faith sprout and the life that makes faith grow and produce fruits and enlarge the church – is wholly contained in the Word.

By the way, that's why we in the Church of the Lutheran Confession focus so much of our attention on the Word of God. Only the Word can create or strengthen faith. And what a relief that is, when you think about it. We don't have to be clever. We don't have to be marketing experts. We don't have to hire motivational speakers or rock bands in order for the church to grow. All we have to do is sow the Word. Our whole calling is to trust the powerful, divine Word of God, and sow it steadily and faithfully. James says, ***Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.*** – James 5:7

That's what we've tried to do with our outreach here at St. Stephen Lutheran Church. Just sow the powerful Word of God and let the Word do the work. And that is what we'll continue to do. Yes, certainly we make use of every outward means that's appropriate to help us spread the powerful Word. But remembering at all times that the power is in the Word, not the means! **THE WORD OF GOD IS AUTOMATIC.** As Paul reminded the Corinthians, ***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.*** – I Cor 3:6-7.

This is great news for your personal witnessing, too, especially if you're the kind of person who tends to worry about whether or not the words you speak are effective. One of the favorite air-to-air missiles utilized by U.S. fighter aircraft is called the AMRAAM "fire-and-forget" missile, so called because you can fire it at your target and then go do something else. As soon as you pull the trigger the missile takes over and homes in on the target all by itself. You can be two states over by that time, and the AMRAAM will still be doing its job. Well, in a sense, the Word of God is a "fire-and-forget" weapon, too. That is, once you speak the Gospel - once you articulate the Good News about Jesus to somebody - the living Word will take over. You don't have to worry about it. It's going to do its work, even if you never see that person again. The seed is planted, and it will grow! God says, ***So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*** **Isaiah 55:11.** Finally, **THE WORD OF GOD IS AUTOMATIC** also in this sense:

### **3. All by itself, it ripens faith for the harvest.**

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Jesus said, **28 All by itself the soil produces grain-- first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. 29 As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."**

The Word of God causes faith to sprout in a believer's heart. The Word of God cultivates that believer and makes faith grow. Eventually the believer matures in his knowledge of the Word. He gains experience in following Christ. From a heart of faith, he brings forth fruits - good works that adorn the Gospel and serve the kingdom of Christ. And finally, at the end of life, comes the crown of a believer's existence, when the Lord of the harvest gathers home His saints. It's true that for the lost - those who have rejected Jesus - the Last Day will bring a fearsome harvest of condemnation. Then the Lord will say to His angels: ***“Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; For the winepress is full, The vats overflow – For their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!”*** – Joel 3:13-14.

But for the believers, for those of us who have been washed clean in the blood of the Lamb, that Day will bring a blessed harvest of saints unto everlasting life. Because of Christ, you have nothing to fear from Judgment Day. That's why our Savior said, ***Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.*** -- Jn 5:24. There's another way we use the word “automatic”, too, isn't there? How about the giant warrior Goliath, with all his experience and his massive weaponry? He may have seemed to be an automatic choice to defeat a lowly shepherd youth named David. But beside his staff and sling, David had something else, something that made his victory automatic – he had faith in God's Word. David said to the

Philistine, ***“You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. 46 This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand.” – I Sam 17:45-46.*** He had no doubt. He had faith! Demonstrating yet again that **THE WORD OF GOD IS AUTOMATIC.** All by itself it makes faith sprout; all by itself it makes faith grow, and all by itself it ripens faith for the harvest. God grant that the seed of the Word sown in our hearts may grow up to bear abundant fruit, and that we in turn may sow the precious seed into the hearts of those with whom we come in contact in our day-to-day lives. One thing we know: we will not sow in vain. The Word will provide abundant fruit – it’s automatic! AMEN.

*The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard and keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*