

“Living in an Automated Word”—Mark 4:26-29

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Living in an Automated Word”, is Mark 4:26-29 → Jesus said: *The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord* (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

How easy and comfortable do you want your life to function? This is basically the question which confronts you every day. Being recipients of the labor intensive efforts of previous generations with their hard physical labor, you have the privilege of living in an automated world. With the inventions of machines to do much of the work, to the development of the technology to drive those machines, one might be surprised when a person actually decides to do a task “the old fashioned way”—“by the sweat of your brow” and putting a lot

of “elbow grease” into it. The more comfortable and automated life of each generation has caused many in the preceding generations to criticize them for having life “too soft,” not really knowing what it means to work. However, how many of those people in the previous generations defined their purpose as “making a better life for their children,” with the desire for them to have opportunities which they themselves never possessed?

The struggle with automation is in our expectations. Automation is great if it makes everything work the way you want it to work. It seems to also reinforce impatience when the automation doesn’t work as perfect or as fast as you desire. At those times we learn that automation is kind of a misnomer. It is not totally automatic because **somebody** is still required to monitor its functioning, enter the proper information into the machine and push the buttons properly to make it serve your desires. Ever feel like you’re serving your machines instead of them serving you?

In our text Jesus talks about living in an automated Word in a parable. Speaking about activity in *the kingdom of God* (i.e. the Church), Jesus used the picture of *a man who scatters seed on the ground*, no doubt expecting it to grow into a crop. As with some of His other parables which used the picture of farming to describe life in His Church, the seed represents the Word of God (cf. Luke 8:11). This

parable focuses on planting the seed and waiting for the growth to take place until it is time for harvesting. From the sower's perspective it grows automatically because . . . that's what's suppose to happen with seed. Thus, the parable describes both your activity as a Christian and the Holy Spirit's activity in the Church of Jesus Christ.

The simple point of Jesus' parable is that the Holy Spirit will produce growth (i.e. bring to faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins) as the Word of His Gospel (i.e. the good news of what Jesus has done for the forgiveness of sins) is shared with others (i.e. like seed planted in the ground). Sounds rather simple. We share the Word of God and the Holy Spirit does the growing. It's a matter of simply trusting God's working through His Word **at all times**.

Such faith clings to the promises of God to work in this way, such as Isaiah 55:11. There Yahweh says, *My word . . . that goes out from My mouth . . . 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.* What a wonderful promise! It actually takes the burden off of you to produce the results of faith and obedience in others. And yet, how difficult to follow because it requires trust and patience to allow growth to take place in its proper time. It reminds us of another promise from God's Word recorded in Ecclesiastes 3:11 → Yahweh *has made everything beautiful in its time.*

To simply plant the seed and look for *God* to give *the growth* (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7) is actually very challenging for us sinners who are control freaks, with control issues, who try to take control of the things of God so often. We constantly face the temptation to think that somehow we are in control of growth in God's Kingdom. This was a common misconception of many of the Jews with whom Jesus dealt during His earthly ministry. One of Jesus' disciples, *Simon the Zealot* (cf. Mark 3:18), belonged to the group of Zealots who believed they should bring in *the kingdom of God* by force with the sword. Of course, they were acting in God's Church from a nationalistic rather than an eternal soul perspective.

This temptation to think that we can produce the results of faith growth in Christ's Church happens when the transition is made from faithfulness to Christ in vocation to maintaining a system. The system and all its activities should serve our sowing the seed of God's Word, not make those within whom the seed of God's Word is rooted and growing live just to serve the system. The focus in the midst of plans, programs and policies is to sow the seed of God's Word through our words and actions on the soil of the hearts and lives of other people. By simply confessing the Person & Work of Jesus we focus on the Holy Spirit working through the Word in efforts to serve our neighbor.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Christian who was imprisoned by Hitler

for confessing Christ in connection to Hitler's dictatorship. Hitler had him executed a week before the defeat of Germany in World War II. He reminds us of the nature of our activity in Christ's Church with these words:

It is not we who build. [Christ] builds the church. No man builds the church but Christ alone. Whoever is minded to build the church is surely well on the way to destroying it; for he will build a temple to idols without wishing or knowing it. We must confess—He builds. We must proclaim—He builds. We must pray to Him—that He may build. We do not know His plan. We cannot see whether He is building or pulling down. It may be that the times which by human standards are times of collapse are for Him the great times of construction. It may be that the times which from a human point of view are great times for the church are times when it is pulled down. It is a great comfort which Christ gives to His church: “you confess, preach, bear witness to Me and I alone will build where it pleases Me. Do not meddle in what is My province.” Do what is given to you to do well and you have done enough. But do it well. Pay no heed to views and opinions. Don't ask for judgments. Don't always be calculating what will happen. Don't always be on the lookout for another refuge! Church, stay a church! But church, confess,

confess, confess! Christ alone is your Lord; from His grace alone can you live as you are. Christ builds. (Writing from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, trans. and ed. Edwin H. Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, © 1965), pp. 216–17.)

We must continue to live in the automated Word of God. In other words, when we persevere in individual Bible reading with the desire to follow that Word, we will continue to work at planting in whatever way the Holy Spirit leads us, with the promise that our *labor in the Lord is not in vain* (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:58). Satan will use many ways to get us to give up confessing the Gospel. We will be tempted to believe that the Holy Spirit is not working through that Word because it's not producing our desires for gratification and the results we want to see. We will be tempted to look at “successes” from our own perspective rather than praying for the Holy Spirit to do His work through that Word, so that on the Last Day the harvest will be plentiful for eternal life to the glory of God. Amen.

*You have been born again,  
not of perishable seed but of imperishable,  
through the living and abiding word of God;  
for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers, and the flower falls,  
but the word of the Lord remains forever.”*

*And this word is the good news that was preached to you.*

(1 Peter 1:23-25)

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