

# Promise and Growth

## June 16, 2024

**Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church**

**Pastor John Scott**

It is a beautiful morning to be here as we continue our *Journey with Jesus* throughout the summer. We are going to be following the gospel readings as Jesus walks along with the people and teaches them and points them ultimately to what he is going to do, which we know is to die and to rise again for us so that we would have life.

So today on this day, when we talk about fathers and celebrate the roles of fathers—many of us have had wonderful fathers; many of us have had subpar fathers; many of us have not had fathers; however, God has always provided. He provides people in our paths and our ways who mentor us, coach us, and show us how much He loves us.

And today we give thanks for all of those people who have taken it upon themselves to be those fathers for us. As we think about fathers, we think about Growth. We think about the way that we grow into who we are called to be and who we truly are. And so we are going to talk about Growth a little bit.

What is growth? What do you think about when you hear that word, when you start to think about growing, what do you think of first? I think about flowers and flowering trees. I have been here almost a year. So, I have seen all the seasons. There is always something flowering here for most of the year at different times. It is absolutely amazing. It is beautiful. And so, you think of growth, you think of the flowers and all the things that you see at different times being incredibly beautiful and at other times being dormant. There is a season for this. There is a season of growth, and there is a season of rest.

What else do you think about when it comes to growth this time of year? I think a lot of us are thinking about our kids, our grandkids, the schools,

and our community. Graduations have happened over the last weekend. A lot of kids are done with school and are celebrating now how much they love sitting in their rooms all day long doing a whole lot of nothing. What do you think about how they grew during the year? Some of us are very excited about the way that our kids grew this year, not just in knowledge, but in stature.

How have you grown? Instead of thinking about other people or the natural world around us, what have you done to grow this year? How have you grown as a person? What things have you worked on? What things have you focused on to grow in? Is anybody still keeping their New Year's resolution? We chuckle a little bit knowing that after three weeks or so, typically most of us give that up. How have you grown this year?

I want to ask you a little bit of a different question. When you look at the people around you, how have you expected the people around you to grow this year? Think about the people in your family, in your house, the kids, grandkids, the people around you. Have you expected growth out of them? Have you expected them to learn that one new thing or to learn that thing that just drives you crazy with that person in your house, that one habit that just makes you go nuts? Have they grown out of that yet? You see, when we talk about growth, it seems nice on the outside. We think about flowers, kids growing up, and being healthy and wonderful. But yet we have all kinds of expectations of growth that are unfulfilled.

When we talk about kingdom parables in the scripture and talk about what growth is in scripture, we get these two images in the New Testament of what it means to grow. Paul especially talks about growing up. Paul tells us to grow up. Mostly, he says something like, "I want you to grow up into Christ;" "I want you to grow up into the person that God has called you to be, into the masterpiece He has created you to be;" "I want you to see Jesus more clearly;" and "I want you to grow like Him." For him, that is what growth really is. That is what we find the word grow in the New Testament. That is what it is usually referring to. But there is this other side to growth, and when the word shows up, it talks about it in kind of

this negative sense of how we grow weary, sometimes even of doing good. We grow weary of doing good.

Growth in today's text is all about Jesus. It is all about seeing Him more clearly and knowing that this is where we are focused. Now, if we have expectations of growth, if we are used to doing things that help us grow a little bit more each and every day, whether it is a knowledge, whether it is in health, whatever it is, we know how important habits are. We know how important it is to do the same things every single day. There is a lot of self-discipline in that. And yet we know that our self-discipline will wane. We know that we are not always so disciplined. We know that we often give up on our goals. We know that we do not meet our own expectations of how smart, how beautiful, how physically fit, or whatever it is that we are trying to grow into that we do not quite get there.

What Paul is trying to help us see, especially in the New Testament, is that that is life. That is living here in this broken world, in this world that is not perfect, that is not right yet. So, he says, look to Christ. Grow up in Him. Do not grow weary of paying attention to Him.

When Jesus was walking around among the crowds, he spoke to them in parables. In today's Gospel reading, early in His ministry, Jesus is talking to a large crowd, and He is trying to help them understand what the kingdom of God is all about. This kingdom in which peace, joy, love, and all these great things of the spirit are full and are fully grown in the kingdom of God. We see that it can be like a farmer who scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, while he's asleep or awake, the seed sprouts and grows, but he does not understand how it is happening.

People understood, just as we do today, that farmers are amazing people. They go out, and they work incredibly hard to plant things. And then all of a sudden, one day the seeds sprout from the ground, and the beautiful plants come up—most of them flower, and they create food. And it is just an amazing thing.

Now, what did the farmer have control over in all of this? He had control over putting the seed in the ground pretty much. Okay. No modern irrigation systems. No fertilizers. This is just putting seeds in the ground and letting nature take its course. The farmer did not have control over any of it. So where is growth in this? Who controls the growth? Where does it come from? How does it work?

Jesus says, “Again, the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that is planted in the ground.” For many children’s messages, I brought out the actual mustard seeds. You have all seen mustard seeds. They are incredibly tiny. Every time I bring them up for children’s messages, they invariably get spilled all over the place. They are just hard to control. They are tiny, but they grow up into these big, huge plants. People knew this. They saw this. They understood this, that from the tiniest of seeds comes this enormous, enormous plant. How does it happen? Who controls that? How does it grow? Well, we do not know. We do not know, but we know that it does.

The kingdom of God is like a farmer, is like a mustard seed, that is who it is supposed to be. And as the work is done, as the following happens, growth happens. Growth happens. No matter whether the farmer is asleep or he’s awake, growth is happening. What Jesus is trying to help people understand is that the kingdom of God is extremely unexpected. It does not work the way that you think it is, nor can it be controlled. The growth that happens here in the kingdom is surprising and amazing. And people like you and me cannot make it happen. Instead in the kingdom, God is the one who makes sure that it happens. This is where the rub comes though, I think. I think it comes in expectations—God’s kingdom is unexpected, and yet we try to expect everything. I have access to my children’s homework assignments and grades through an app on my phone. I can check to see if they have gone to school. I can see whether they are tardy to any of their classes immediately. I can see whether they have turned in their assignments or whether they are still outstanding. I can see what grades they got on them. I can see how late their teacher is

in grading those assignments. I can see all these things. I have all this data, all of this information. And if I was not careful, I could use all of this. And my expectations of my students, of their teachers, of their school could be so high that none of those people or institutions could ever meet it.

Do you do this with yourself as well? We chuckled about New Year's resolutions. But do you do this? Do you have expectations of yourself that are so rigid and so high that your experience is that you never meet them? And when you do not meet them, what does that do to you? Are you constantly trying to get that feeling back of being more and more disciplined so that you can control exactly who you are, exactly what's going on in your life?

Part of living in the kingdom of God means trusting in this God whose kingdom it is, that He is going to, no matter what is happening in your world, no matter whether you are experiencing incredible times or awful times, that He is with you, and He is there. And through all of this, He is going to do something good in His kingdom.

I asked you this question, whose expectations are you trying to follow? Because it helps us understand that so much of our effort is spent focusing on ourselves. All the New Testament, Paul, and Jesus are trying to get us to do is to focus on Jesus, to see Him.

Jesus used many similar stories and illustrations, these parables, to teach people as much as they could understand. This is kind of a strange thing. Jesus is not being derogatory to people, but He's saying, "This is hard. Life is difficult. And I'm going to try to help you through stories to see that the kingdom of God is something different than you expect. It is greater than you expect. It has a different King who is in charge."

As He taught them these lessons, they built faith and trust in Him so that in about eight chapters in Mark, when Jesus goes to the Cross, they see something completely unexpected, that the King of the whole world would die on behalf of the whole world, to give Himself up to bring the world back to God that they might see that that is exactly what the kingdom of

God is all about. It is unexpected. It is focused on Jesus. We can understand that in the middle of this, we know that growth will happen.

This is the kingdom. It will happen as God wills it, as He calls it. But just like that the farmer goes out, plants the seed, does the work, and is who he's called to be, so we are as well. We work together as a congregation, as people of God, as brothers and sisters in Christ, as God has blessed us, as He has made us. And we do the things He's called us to do with great joy with great patience, with all that we know that through this, through God's people right here, His kingdom grows; we may not be able to control it or make it happen, but He does. And He will make it grow.

Let's close with the word.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for being with us today, for reminding us, Lord, that Your kingdom grows by Your hand. We pray Lord, that You would allow us to continue to be as You have called us to be, to use our gifts, our skills, and our talents in the unique way that You have blessed us all the while focusing on You and not on ourselves.

Lord, when others do not meet our expectations or when we do not, Lord, let us give up that disappointment and instead focus on You and how You Lord would love the people around us. Let us do that. Let us be that as we journey with You.

We pray it all in Jesus' name. Amen.