

“THE GARDEN OF PROCLAMATION”

Mark 4:26-29

Dear Friends in the Lord,

Right now, it's the farthest thing from your mind. With snow banks nearly your height, there's no way to predict when you'll start. With spring only **15** days from today, there are parts of the country that normally are weeks ahead in the season. But this year is not normal and most parts of the country are not ahead.

I'm thinking of your gardens and flowerbeds. With frost as deep as 6', there's a long way to go to melt the snow and thaw the soil enough to work it. But as they say, **THIS CAN'T LAST. IT HAS TO GET WARM!**

And today, the warming begins (continues), if not outside, then right here in church. With the backdrop of Lent now upon us, the frost is out of the ground and the soil is soft enough to work. So on this Ash Wednesday, we begin planting to enjoy the miracle of the growing process. Only this garden is not in your backyard. This flowerbed is not along your front sidewalk.

This garden is in your hearts where the Holy Spirit plants the seed of salvation through Jesus Christ. How do we know? How can we be sure? That Gospel is exactly what we need to go from **THE GARDEN TO GLORY**. That's our Lenten theme for 2014 and that theme (begins) (continues) our series today as we focus on:

“THE GARDEN OF PROCLAMATION”

God planted the very first seed of our salvation in the Garden of Eden. That seed was the promise to send us a Savior—a rescuer—from sin, death, and damnation. Now God proclaims his promise of salvation to us in Jesus. He *tells* us this promise. And when he tells us this promise, he also *gives* us this promise. (*I can tell you I want it warm outside, but my proclamation doesn't make it warm outside*). How does God tell us? He does not produce a vision in our hearts. He does not wait for some inner feeling or experience in us to make it real for us. God arranged something outside of us. God wrote it all down for us on the pages of his Word.

God instituted the holy ministry and publicly appoints certain individuals in the church to speak to us for him. That why we honor our “called-workers”. They are His representatives, his ambassadors proclaiming the message of Christ.

But they aren't the only ones. God is pleased with any mom or dad or fellow believer who speaks the truth of God's Word. It is the same as if God himself was proclaiming it to you. Jesus said “**Go . . . and preach the good news to all creation**” (Mk 16:15). **He who listens to you listens to me**” (Lk 10:16). Paul wrote, “**How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?**” (Ro 10:14). We, who were created from the dust of the earth, are his soil. And when God plants his Word in us, new life grows—a never-ending life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus proclaims what the Kingdom of God is like: “**A MAN SCATTERS SEED ON THE GROUND. NIGHT AND DAY, WHETHER HE SLEEPS OR GETS UP, THE SEED SPROUTS AND GROWS, THOUGH HE DOES NOT KNOW HOW. ALL BY ITSELF THE SOIL PRODUCES GRAIN—FIRST THE STALK, THEN THE HEAD, THEN THE FULL KERNEL IN THE HEAD. AS SOON AS THE GRAIN IS RIPE, HE PUTS THE SICKLE TO IT, BECAUSE THE HARVEST HAS COME**”

God proclaims and God plants when he scatters the seed of His Word in us, and it becomes a garden of life and salvation. He uses His Holy Spirit to work through that word to take root in the soil of our sinful souls. That's as miraculous as a farmer planting his fields. **He sleeps, he gets up**, he does his chores, he goes about his business **all the while the seed sprouts, grows, and produces the stalk, the head, then the full kernel in the head**. The farmer does nothing to make the seed grow faster, bigger, taller or fuller.

So in **the Garden of Proclamation**. Luther once said: *God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word...*” God's kingdom is neither geographical nor political. It grows wherever and whenever the Gospel seed is scattered through the Means of Grace. The Holy Spirit makes it grow, and we like the farmer just sit back in awesome wonder at the results.

In this 1st Lenten service and every Sunday service, we see the Garden of Proclamation at work. God proclaims and plants the Gospel as Christ comes to us in Word & Sacraments to forgive, renew, and give life. People hear it in repentant faith confessing their sins and receiving God's absolution through Christ. Your sins, my sins are paid for in the blood of Jesus. God proclaims and plants the Gospel in the Supper of Christ's body and blood. Guilt is replaced with pardon. Shame is changed to peace. As Luther said: “*Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.*”

Yet to the naked eye, this kingdom doesn't look like much. Bread is just bread, wine is just wine, water is just water. **Proclaiming your sins forgiven** is just a bunch of words. The only thing sermons heal is insomnia. There are no headlines for the paper here! Let's just stop planting the **GARDEN OF PROCLAMATION!**

Go and tell that to Isaiah who echoes God's promise that His word grows in the soil of people's hearts. "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." {Is 55:11} When a farmer plants the seed, he does so to harvest the crop. At the end of time, we will see the marvelous crop the Lord harvests through [the Garden of Proclamation](#).

But we don't have to wait that long. The seed of the Gospel is already growing in [The Garden of Proclamation](#). Remember your pastors in confirmation class when they planted a single seed in you? It was such a small seed. That seed seemed like it was lying dormant for so long—until it sprouted when your girl/boy friend suggested, "Hey, we love each other so let's just move in together. It's cheaper that way and besides, everyone does it. And then you recall what your pastors taught you about leading a chaste and decent life, and you respond, "No, not now - I can't betray my Savior that way. The right thing to do is to wait until we are married." [The Garden of Proclamation](#) has *sprouted & blossomed*.

A small congregation always remained about the same size for two decades. But in that time it **served hundreds of members** with the gospel through fliers, devotions on its website or Facebook and its radio broadcast. [The Garden of Proclamation](#) has *spread like ivy*.

You teenager went to church. You didn't think you heard much for your life in the service until you go to the mall with your friend in the afternoon. She's all upset about her parents. She thinks they don't love her. **She talks about committing suicide**. A thought from the morning service about the peace of God guarding your hearts and minds jumps into your mind. You want her to have that peace so you tell her about Jesus' love. [The Garden of Proclamation](#) has *planted seed in new soil*.

You are jittery about entering the pastor's office to unload to him what you've been hiding for so long. You're afraid he will think differently of you. To your great surprise he speaks like he is making an announcement. **He reminds you that you are baptized** and announces, "*Jesus has forgiven all your sins. He has removed your guilt. You are reconciled through Him.*" Your emotions break down, your stomach is no longer queasy, the heavy burden is lifted off your heart. [The Garden of Proclamation](#) has been *watered and nourished*.

You are now 92 yrs old in a care facility. You can't be at home anymore. You're frustrated that you just can't get your thoughts together; you don't remember; you're slipping away, you don't make any sense when you talk. You feel like giving up. **Your pastor pays a visit** and prays the Lord's Prayer. It's like being home again. You even mouth a couple of words with him. A few days later, the breathing grows erratic, shallow, weak. With your eyes closed, you take one final breath. [The Garden of Proclamation](#) has been *harvested and the crop is safely home!*

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FROM GARDEN TO GLORY! Amen.