

Mark 4:26-34 – Year B
June 13, 2021

Grace and peace to you from God our Creator, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

You know something – time really does fly. Like the fact it was ten years ago this past Friday I was installed to be pastor in this wonderful place with all you wonderful, beloved, precious children of God. Or the fact this congregation celebrated its 125th anniversary this past October.

Early this morning I was reflecting on the fact our youngest turned 21 today and how quickly those years have seemed to come and go. I remember when we first learned the news Amanda was pregnant. We went out and bought all the books (aka, *So you're expecting for Dummies*) so that we could be in the know. Even though I was a bit terrified about being a dad, I can recollect longing for those 9 months to fly by to see this baby that had been taking shape week-by-week. To learn if she was a girl or a boy. I could not wait to get a glimpse of this little one who had been doing somersaults in her mother's belly and like clockwork had the hiccups every night.

And we were ready. The nursery was painted. The crib was up. The closet was stocked with diapers, blankets, and baby bottles. And then we were nearly there – 2 weeks before the due date. "It could be any day now," said the doctor. Take her on walks said our friends. So, we did.

1 week from the due date. "It could be any day now," said the doctor. People told us other things to do to coax things along.

And finally, it was the day (i.e., due date) and still nothing. I could not take it anymore. My mind was out of control. There had to be something we could do to expedite the process. Again, we went to the obstetrician. "It could be any day now." No, I thought. This does not work with my schedule. I tied up all the loose ends at work and was good to go. Now was the time.

Someone told us to go out for Chinese food – that did not work. Someone told us to go for a hike. Surely, that had to work. Nope! I was nearly pulling my hair out at this point. Finally, in week 2 post due date we were told to head to the hospital, and they would induce Amanda. Well, that did not work either because shortly after we arrived Amanda went into labor.

Now, with our second child, I thought we were in total control. I mean we were experts this time. Yeah, that did not work out so well. Thinking Matt would come late like Lauren we soon learned he had other plans and 2 weeks before his due date we were on our way to the hospital without a new car seat bought or the closet stocked full of diapers. We were far from ready to welcome this new bundle of joy into the world.

Just as so many things in life have a way of teaching us valuable lessons, pregnancy did too. No matter how hard I wanted to remain in control and work the birth of our 2 children into the time slot that best fit my needs it did not work either time. I read all the books, went to the Lamaze classes, scoured the internet, and followed the manual to a “T” but in the end I really did not have a say. And that is a little bit how life operates isn’t it?

From a young age we are taught that gaining mastery over our surroundings is advantageous. From learning to walk, tie our shoes, cook, or drive, to planning for college, marriage, and a family. Whatever it is we become accustomed to being in control and that makes things beyond our control so challenging (e.g., a global pandemic or a windstorm, i.e., “Derecho,” the likes none of us have ever seen before). Yet again, we are reminded we are vulnerable and mortal beings.

We want so desperately to control our own lives and possibly even the lives of those around us. We do not want to let go of the steering wheel for fear that without our hands on it the car we are riding in will veer out of control. Yet, like it or not, we simply are not in control of everything that happens. If we cannot control our own lives, how much truer is that about the kingdom of God, indeed, everything about God. Is that not what Jesus is saying in this first parable from our Gospel lesson?

"The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come." (v.26-29)

The kingdom comes on its own. We do not know how but it does come. We do not know when, but Jesus does fill us in on the promise that God will bring the kingdom in God's good time. We are not in control of the in-breaking of God's kingdom. We are not in control of the harvest. We are not in control of trying to decide who is saved and who is not. We are not in control! We are not God! We are totally reliant upon God's grace and God's mercy. And yes, that is not an easy thing to admit and accept – we are not in control.

Yet is not there some freedom in that? Is not there a weight lifted off our shoulders knowing that we are not ultimately responsible for bringing in the kingdom? Cannot we breathe a bit easier knowing we do not have to do it all or figure it out ourselves? Does not this allow us the release from the bondage of anxiety, fear, and worry that we must have an answer to every challenge we as a community of faith might encounter in our lives together? Is this not gospel news? Whether it be the top of the morning or the setting of the sun what would happen if we just stopped and reminded ourselves, "We are not in control." God is faithful and trustworthy and is at work bringing the kingdom to fruition.

But let us not take the freedom that we are not in control in vain by assuming therefore we can simply sit idle and do nothing. Rest on our laurels. God has given us a role to play just as the farmer has a role to play in waiting for the harvest. We are invited to participate in God's kingdom, to share in the mission of Jesus Christ, and serve alongside the Holy Spirit even given the fact it is often beyond our comprehension and control. And perhaps that is where the freedom of not being in control comes in. In not having to worry about everything we are, as Pastor David Lose reminds us, "free to work, to risk, to love, to sacrifice, to wait, to wonder ... not with the hope of ushering in the kingdom but because God has promised to bring the kingdom in good time.

In the meantime, therefore, we can throw ourselves into the tasks at hand, not hoping to save the world but, because God has done that, do our best to take care of the little corner of the world we find ourselves in.”

In conclusion, I do realize this world beyond our control often does not turn out as we had hoped. Miscarriages happen. A couple is unable to conceive. The joy Amanda and I were filled with at the birth of our children all those years ago is not experienced by some and that anticipated joyous miracle of childbirth quickly gives way to horror, pain, sorrow, grief, and a nightmare no one should have to endure. Our vulnerability, lack of control, and mortality hits home in a way like no other. You long for answers that never come. The One who ushers in the kingdom seems far removed.

I do not know that pain. Most of us gathered do not know that pain, that grief, that nightmare. Our heart aches for all who have endured, are enduring, or will endure such a horrific tragedy such as this. While these two parables Jesus gives us this morning may not speak directly to your pain, this state of being in which we often feel we have no control that is at times terrifying and just the opposite of freeing, I remind you the gospel of Mark immediately follows our two parables this morning with an event that shook the lives of Jesus’ disciples, moved them to fear, and left them in a state completely beyond their control as they found themselves in a boat upon the sea being tossed to and fro as a furious squall threatened to swamp and capsize their vessel. Yet, they were not alone. In Mark’s version of this miracle story, Jesus is in the boat with them. He saw their fear. He heard their pleas for help. He did not leave their side. He calmed the storm. Safely guided them to the other side of the sea.

While things happen. Life happens. Beyond our control. Seemingly out of control. The promise, hope and good news that we live by, that shapes and transforms our lives, that we are called to share indoors, outdoors, in our homes and on the streets with all we meet is the fact we are never alone. God is faithful. God is love. God is good. Christ is with us. Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Sources Consulted

David Lose (www.davidlose.net)