Sunday, June 27, 1982
IT'S INEVITABLE!
Mark 4:26-34

These two parables told by Jesus which we have just read, go together. The first sets forth the secrecy, the mystery, and the sureness of growth of God's Kingdom. The second tells of the astonishing contrast between the small and seemingly insignificant beginning and the surprising and magnificent result. Both speak of the inevitability of God's love and God's Kingdom.

Let's look at these two parables more closely. In the first we have a man who sowed his fields. When he had done his job, he went about his other work. He fed the cattle, mended the fences, went to town, took his rest, and got up again the next day to go about his work. This he did day after day and all the while the seed he had planted continued to grow, even though in the early stages of growth he could not see that the seed was growing. He could only wait. After a time, a tiny blade peeked through the soil, then later the stalk and much later the grain appeared. The growing goes on automatically. He can do very little about it. He cannot force the growth.

The second parable is similar. Jesus said that a tiny seed may be among the smallest of things we can see, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes a large shrub or tree and puts forth large branches. This too is what the Kingdom of God is like, said Jesus.

How do these parables speak to our present-day situation?

1. Note first, that these are parables of comfort and hope. What a comfort it is to know that when much of the world seems out of control, and in the midst of all of our scheming and planning and good and bad speculations; in the midst of all our activity and our failures, there is still another stream of events flowing silently and mysteriously on — that God is letting his seeds grow, and that God's Kingdom is quietly at work even though we cannot always see it.

To put it another way, the one fixed pole in all the bewildering confusion is the faithfulness and dependability of God. Insane as we human beings may be with our idea that we can control everything; insane as the nuclear arms race is; at the same time, God's faithfulness, God's love and care continue and are always at work in the world. There is a grace of God, a divine force, working in the world. We can cooperate with it, or oppose it, but it works on and grows anyway. It's automatic. God's nourishing, redeeming power is in the very constitution of the universe. We cannot create it. We cannot block it. But we can depend on it and work with it.

The disciples in Jesus' time must've thought the world to be as confusing and out of control as we sometimes do. Some of them were tempted to join the Zealots who wanted to hurry up and force a swifter and surer method of establishing the Kingdom. There is always the temptation to delusive short cuts of force and violence when things aren't moving fast enough for us. Instead of that, Jesus in these parables reminds us of the sure forces of God which bring grain of themselves.

What a tremendous pressure there was on Jesus to try to force him to hectic, explosive, nervous activity; to get on with it and set up his kingdom. But how utterly different was the actual life of Jesus Christ as we see it in the gospels.

Though Rome occupied Palestine, and whole continents were in desperate need, Jesus still had time to stop and talk to the individual, time to spend with children, time to pray. He associated with publicans and sinners, the lonely and the despised. He appeared not to be bothered at all that these were not strategically important people, that they had no prominence, that they were not key figures, were not the movers and shakers, but were only the unfortunate lost children of God. He could do this because he had the confidence and the comfort and the hope that God's seed was planted and growing.

2. Secondly, these two parables remind us that although the Kingdom of God, God's rule, the power of suffering love, often seems tiny and insignificant on this earth when compared to the worldly powers, nuclear weapons, aircraft carriers, large armies, all of which we worship so much; God's Kingdom will in the end prevail. The Kingdom of God said Jesus, is like a tiny seed that grows secretly, but is has within it a power beyond our comprehension. Do not let the tiny see fool you because of its size. The tiny acorn become the giant oak.

It's almost impossible for us to realize just how tiny a seed the Christian movement was in the time of Jesus. Or to reverse the image, it was impossible for the disciples to visualize that their small band of followers whose leader was this wandering Rabbi, who died on the cross, unrecognized in his own time as anyone important, that this tiny see would one day grow as it has. Compared to the Roman Empire in worldly terms, it was nothing.

Yet all the most powerful movements in history which have changed the course of history, and which have expanded justice and equality, began as tiny seeds somewhere, often growing secretly. The things that begin with a big band and lots of hoopla, which become sensational overnight, are often the ones that do not last. They have no staying power.

And those movement which are a part of God's Kingdom because they extend justice and equality, cannot be stopped.

The anti-slavery movement in this country began as a tiny seed. The forces that were allayed against it were sure that this tiny seed would never grow into anything significant. The people of influence and power supported slavery. After all, who were the original anti-slavery leaders? Some idealistic church people who had no influence or power. But that movement grew and grew. AT the same time, some of the country's most respected leaders said that the anti-slavery movement would come to nothing. They foresaw slavery's indefinite continuance. Even Edmund Burke said that.

But slavery was wrong! And like a tiny seed growing, that idea spread. Slavery could never be harmonized with the principles of Christ or with God's Kingdom.

Gandhi's movement for freedom in India was similar. On March 12, 1930, Gandhi, accompanied by 78 men and women, set out on foot on a two-hundred mile walk to the sea. There they planned to defy the government by making salt from seawater in disobedience of the Salt Act, which provided for a government monopoly of the manufacture of salt, levied a tax on its sale and prohibited Indians from making it.

Great Britain ruled India at that point and the leaders of the government thought of Gandhi as a nobody. Who was this small man with a few peasant followers to defy the British Empire with all of its power and military might? The British authorities treated the salt march as a joke. They thought Gandhi had lost touch with reality.

About a month later, as a result of the salt march, the entire country was aroused. Thousands, the tens of thousands of Indians swarmed to the beaches of India's lengthy seacoast to defy the British government by making salt. In the streets of the big cities massive demonstrations were held, at which large amounts of illegal salt were sold.

Not too much later, Gandhi, led his country to freedom without an army and without any guns. Tiny seeds can grow into massive movements when they are on the side of justice and freedom.

The civil rights movement in this country is another example of a tiny seed growing into a large movement. On December 1, 1955, Mrs. Rosa L. Parks was arrested for violating the bus segregation law in Montgomery, Alabama. She refused to give up her seat to a white man who got on the bus latter. A tiny seed was planted. Who was this black woman to defy the mighty forces of segregation?

On December 5, 1955, the Montgomery bus boycott began. Three hundred eighty-one days later, on December 21, 1956, the buses of Montgomery, Alabama were integrated, and the civil rights movement spread. Voter registration drives, march, sit-in, thousands of black and white people got into the action. These were the little people thought by the leaders to be the nobodies of the world.

But the seed had been planted and no one could stop its growing.

In our time, the movement to limit nuclear weapons and then to gradually reduce the stockpiles in both Russia and this country is not going to die. The seed had been planted. How fast it will grow is not known. But such seeds do not die. Someday the idea that war is insane and stupid will spread. That seed idea has been planted.

The movement for equal rights for women will not die out simply because the equal rights amendment to the constitution failed to get enough state legislatures to approve it by this Wednesday, July 1. The seed had been planted and it will continue to grow and spread. Equal rights will be gained. It's inevitable!

The seed had already been planted in other parts of the world. Three years ago, my wife and I were on the Island of Cyprus, attending a seminar to learn more about the Eastern Orthodox Churches. One Sunday morning we attended the local Orthodox church in the little country village of Ayia Napa. In traditional Orthodox worship, the men and the women are in separate parts of the building — the women have to sit in the back and are not allowed to come into the area where the men are during the service. And only men read and lead in the liturgy. Also, the women are supposed to be dressed in modest fashion with arms and shoulders covered — no sleeveless sun dresses.

But we noticed in this little village church that some of the fathers were now bringing their daughters into the place where only men were supposed to be. WE also noticed one young woman of the village who walked confidently into the area of the church where only men are supposed to be. She kissed the holy icons, did her own acts of worship and after a time returned back to the women's area. She wore a simple dark colored sun dress — shoulders uncovered. No one seemed to take offense. Later in the day we asked the local school master who had been the leader of the worship about the woman. His reply was, "Oh, she's a woman of the new spirit."

It’s a mysterious fact that throughout history as these tiny seeds for freedom and equality and justice have been planted, they have continued to grow Also, it’s a fact that many of the well-born, worldly-wise prosperous and powerful political leaders have been on the wrong side of the supreme issues of their time. But that has not kept the seeds from growing.

As Christians, this should not surprise us. The seeds of God’s kingdom will continue to grow and spread. God has the whole world in his hands. The world is not in the hands of the evil one or the power and principalities that seek to thwart the divine will. To be sure, the seeds often seem to be growing secretly, and evil is still present in the world, but no ultimate harm can come to the purposes of God. Battles may be lost, but the war is won.

There are many seeds of God’s Kingdom planted in this world, some growing secretly, and some visible. So, this is a parable of hope. God’s power continues to work in the world — often quietly, sometimes hidden, but it cannot be overcome. It’s inevitable. Amen.