

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

For some reason, when something breaks at my house, or gets lost, it's never anyone's fault—
whatever was lost, has moved *on its own*; or whatever is broken, fell *all by itself*.
Things *just happen*—and no one knows *how*!

Now, we know every effect has a cause.
Every broken glass has someone or something that nudged it over the edge.
There's always a reason for the things that happen.
Always a doer, a subject of the verb, it's always someone's fault.

The problem, though, is that we assume the reason or the cause must always come from *us*.
But today's Gospel says otherwise:

**“The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.
He sleeps and rises night and day; the seed sprouts and grows; *but he knows not how*.
The earth produces *by itself*, first the blade, then the ear, then full grain in the ear.
When the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”**
(Mark 4:26-29)

This unique parable is about a man, *any* man, who goes out to sow his seed.
Who the man is, isn't important.
Is he rich and well-to-do? *Doesn't matter*.
Is he strong or skilled; nice and compassionate, or rude and quarrelsome? *Doesn't matter*.
A man, *any* man, sows his seed.

Then Jesus says,
**“And he sleeps and gets up [as usual], night and day [as regular as can be],
and the seed sprouts and grows up, *but he knows not how*” (4:27).**
That is to say, the sower goes on with his other occupations—
the seed works on its own without him.

And it's not that the sower doesn't care about the seed; he just trusts it to do its work.

And then, we hear: **“the earth bears fruit of itself...”** (4:28)
or, as the Greek says more clearly, ***automatically***.

This Greek word, *automatē*, only appears a couple other times in the Scriptures:
once in Acts 12, and once in Leviticus 25.
And each time whatever happens isn't because of man, but because of God.
It's the Lord's doing, the Lord's work, the Lord's fault, *not ours*.

This, I think, is the single greatest sin pastors commit:
we always think we're the cause, whether good or bad, of what goes on in the Church.
We don't accept the bit about *not knowing how*.
And we don't believe the word will *automatically* do what it sets out to do.

We think there must be more, something else I can do—something I can add to guarantee results:
 Am I convincing or persuasive?
 Am I winsome and welcoming?
 Am I over their heads or saying anything at all?
 Am I doing enough, loving enough, preaching well-enough?
 Am I *effective*?

These thoughts run through our minds, at least my mind, far too often.
 If I just did a bit more, would the church grow?
 If I made one more call, one more visit, would he be in church today?
 If I change the music, redo the liturgy, or wear different clothes, would more come?
 If I just did—*more*.

Every program, study, or technique—
 whatever guarantees results, whatever we think will work—
 will never be enough; for *we know not how*.

And that's our sin as pastors.
 We constantly look for results, for numbers, for success, as if we were the cause.
 We think that by coming up with a new vision or goal, a new model or way of doing church,
then people will come, *then* they'll get it, *then* our work will be effective.

Repent, O pastor.
 You aren't the cause. You aren't given to know how, or why, or how much.
 You're called to sow, called to preach.

The Kingdom of God is like a man who *sows*—then lies down, gets up, night and day—
and he knows not how. Automatically the seed does what it sets out to do.

If man is the cause of growth, faith, trust, salvation, then there's always something more.
 Then we're constantly measuring, constantly tweaking and changing, trying to find control.
 And in this there is no joy, only sin and despair and burn out and depression and failure.

But if God is the cause of growth and faith, then what do we have to fear!
 If it's all up to God, then there's freedom, then there's joy.

We pastors think far too highly of ourselves; we think everything depends on us.
 And worse yet, we teach you to feel that way too.

But it doesn't.
 It doesn't depend on our ability or skill or personality or effectiveness.
 It depends on God. On the seed. On the Word.

And the pastor is a servant of that Word for you.
 He's a sower, not a leader or a visionary or a CEO.

The pastor is called to preach the Word of God, whether he likes it or not, whether its kind or not,
 whether he'll lose members or not, whether it seems it'll work or not.
 He's there to speak of Christ and Him crucified for you—
 over and over and over again.

And today's parable tells us not to calculate or measure or quantify the results.
 There's no technique given in today's parable.
 He just preaches—
 no programs, no vision, no fear—
 just the Word, just Christ for you.

The rest is up to the Word, to Christ, to God as He sees fit.

We trust that *automatically*, even though we don't know how, the Word will bear fruit.
 It needs no measurement, no metrics, no counting, no progress.

The Word, Jesus Christ crucified for you, simply comes,
 and He does what He promises to do.
 He forgives your sin, He gives His life for you, He nourishes and feeds
 and He Himself gives the growth—Jesus is the subject of the verb.

And if you'd like Him to do His work with your friends or neighbors or relatives or children—
 if you'd like Him to forgive and nourish and feed and grow them as well—
 then bring them to church, give them the Word, sow the seed.

Bring them to the place Christ has promised to be *for you*, for them.

Don't worry whether you'll say it right, or if they'll reject you, or how you'll come across.
 The Word will do the work, *automatically*, and we don't need to know how.

So scatter this Word, and scatter freely!
 Wherever our Lord has placed you, scatter this Word of the Gospel, that Christ has forgiven all.
 If you're a grandma, scatter amongst your grandchildren.
 If you're a teacher, among your students.
 If you're a carpenter, or burger flipper, or work in retail, scatter it there.

Invite them to church, to the preaching of the Gospel,
 where sins are forgiven and Christ comes to us.

Don't worry if you don't know how it all works.
 Our Lord does, and He does all things well, *automatically*, by His Word.

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