

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – 2024
Ezekiel 17:22-24
2 Corinthians 5:1-17
Mark 4:26-34

Everyone whose name is written in the book of life will be saved. That's the doctrine of election. No one will be "missing" from heaven. Faith saves you. The Lord Christ saves you. The Word and the Sacraments save you. What God determined to do from eternity He has accomplished in time. "God has from eternity resolved to do for His Christians what He has effected in them in time" (Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III, pg. 473). From eternity, the Almighty wrote your name in the book of life. In time, God sent His Son who died for the sins of the whole world and rose again. In time, the word of the Gospel came upon you. In time, the Holy Spirit invaded your heart and mind when you were baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of election is an encouragement for believers who face adversity, who face doubt and fear and shame. Faith perseveres. Faith can be rattled, faith can hang by a thread, faith can go on an unhappy walkabout but the faith of those who are elect does not quit, does not get extinguished, does not crumple up and die. In the doctrine of election, eternity and time are synchronized. In the doctrine of election we see God at work to do exactly as He has planned.

Here are three passages that hammer home that point. Jesus said: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:27-29). St. Paul writes this priceless word: "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). Here's the last one. Time and eternity kiss in this passage. "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48).

God has intricately planned your salvation. God is overseeing your salvation presently. God will ensure that you enter His eternal realm. And you will face adversity (Acts 14:22). Life is hard. Even more, remaining in the faith is hard. There are attacks on truth, attacks on justice, attacks on freedom. The greatest attack, the most consequential attack you will face is the attack on your faith. Satan is a thief. The world is a grim collection of hedonism, humanism, and active unbelief. Some attacks on your faith come from the outside but perhaps more of a threat is the attack that comes from the inside. Some Christians crave more from God than what He has in His Word. "It's not enough!" They won't say it but they act it. Some Christians grow tired of being submissive to a God that the world clearly hates so they discard their trust, discard their hope, discard their faith. Some people want God to operate the way that the world operates – glamour and neon and bulging muscles and fake eyelashes. If there's anything that a crucified Messiah tells us it's that God will not operate according to the world's principles. Of all the ideas for us to get through our heads, this is perhaps the foremost: God will not operate according to the world's notions.

Our Lord tells parables to illuminate His kingdom. The first is that the seed produces "automatically" (αὐτοματῇ v.28), produces all by itself, without any outside assistance. The

second is that the kingdom is sown seemingly in the most insignificant way but it produces on a huge scale. In adversity, you need these truths to saturate your heart. In adversity, you need this ballast, this heft, this strength to anchor your soul. They are connected, these two ideas. The mustard seed – it's so small. There's nothing impressive about a mustard seed. The Son of God lying in a manger – that's a mustard seed. The Son of Man has no place to lay His head – that's a mustard seed (Luke 9:58). The Messianic King is crucified and by His suffering He establishes His kingdom – that's a mustard seed. We walk by faith and not by sight not because appearances *may be* deceiving but because appearances *will be* deceiving. Small; do you overlook the small? Do you look for love in only the “big” places? Do you know Christ's smile in a person who seems forsaken, who appears forgotten by the world, inconsequential? The sick and the naked and the imprisoned and the stranger and the hungry – Christ hides Himself in these that you might find Him there, love Him there, serve Him there, recognize His kingdom there. His words are unambiguous: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

Faith cannot live in a heart that does not love. If you love only the great, if you love only the lovely, if you love only those who love you then you are not loving as Christ loved. Christ's kingdom comes in a way that looks insignificant. A Roman cross with death claiming a powerless rabbi – and all of God's glory is unleashed there. That glory has saved an untold number of sinners. That kingdom has erupted in this world and the power of Christ's love has transformed people who are curved in on themselves into people who truly love others as Christ has first loved us (1 John 4:19). The kingdom comes in small things, insignificant looking things. The church adores Christ's small things. The world turns its adoring heart to Park Avenue and the allure of wealth. The world turns its adoring heart toward Madison Avenue and the allure of glamour. The small things of Christ are the preached Word (1 Peter 1:23-25), the Eucharistic Feast (1 Corinthians 11:23-26), the Baptism that united one to Christ, the King of small things (Romans 6:1-11). When you ally yourself to Christ's small things you ally yourself to Him, His kingdom.

The harvest is coming. “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” (2 Peter 3:9-10). The harvest is coming and God has Himself a bumper crop. Why? Because the Word does not return empty (Isaiah 55). This glorious Word has power within it so that it accomplishes precisely what God wants. Life out of lifelessness; God created by this Word. The Holy Spirit attends this Word. The love of Christ is embedded in it and you come to know that love through this Word. Automatically; the church continues to grow because this Word accomplishes the purpose for which it was sent. You are maturing in this Word. Christ the King Lutheran Church is maturing for one reason only – this Word is having its way with us. Our sins have been atoned by the blood of Christ and that reality comes to us through this Word, a Word sown in us by Christ Himself. He said: “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). He serves you with His death and resurrection and His kingdom comes. Look for it. Embrace it. Thank God for it. Live its truths. Pass on its love. Cherish His name and His people. Look for love in small places. Give Christ's love in the forgotten places. “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11).