Small Group Notes for the Week of January 9, 2022

# Scripture:

# Mark 4:26-34

# New Revised Standard Version

**26**He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, **27**and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. **28**The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. **29**But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

**30**He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? **31**It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; **32**yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

**33**With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; **34**he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

**General Questions:**

1. What stood out to you in the sermon?

2. What is something new you didn’t know before?

3. Is there a question that the sermon prompted for/in you?

4. How do you feel called to respond to the sermon?

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Share your favorite and/or memorable moments you had with Pastor Nate. What made those moments special? What do you think were the seeds he had planted while he was at the Kirk? Which of Nate’s ministries are you most grateful for?
2. Pastor Nate said this about baptism in his sermon:

*“I can remember one baptism when a child stopped me afterward and said:*

*“Why did you sanitize that baby?”*

*I said, “that’s really something that you need to ask Pastor Angela.”*

*No, I didn’t say that*

*I said, “according to John Calvin, it is the sign of the initiation by which we are received into the society of the church, in order that, engrafted in Christ, we may be reckoned among God's children."*

*No, I didn’t say that.*

*No I said, “Don’t you have a Sunday School class to be at?”*

*No, I didn’t say that.*

*Truth be told, I can’t remember exactly what I told that child, but if I had to do it over again I would tell her -*

*“We do this - we sanitize her, as you say - because it’s how we show that we care about her life, and that God cares about her life.”*

# How would you answer that child’s question about baptism (or sanitization!)? Take the time to have everyone articulate an answer to that question. This Sunday (Jan. 9) also happens to be The Baptism of the Lord Sunday. Read the passage where Jesus is baptized:

# *Matthew 3:13-17*

# *New Revised Standard Version*

***13****Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.****14****John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”****15****But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented.****16****And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.****17****And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”*

What does Jesus’ baptism teach us about baptism in general?

1. Pastor Nate says this in his sermon:

*“Things have not always been precise, I’ll be the first to admit that. I’m not ashamed to admit it either … this place is not a business, it isn’t an assembly line, Detroit … it is a patch of ground … maybe even a fertile patch … and we have been about spinning the spreader over the lawn and … the only way we are going to know if we are doing this right is if, someday, later on, life springs up …*

*Life springs up here … in our garden.”*

What difference would it make to think of the church as a business vs. a patch of ground? How would our expectations and the way we approach one another be different at church? How would it enrich our life of faith and the community? Have you ever thought of the church as garden we need to cultivate? What’s needed in order for us to take care of this garden called the church?

1. Read the scripture passage above (Mark 4:26-34). What does it mean that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed? What do we know about the Kingdom of God if it’s like a mustard seed?
2. Spend time praying for Pastor Nate, his family and their future. Give thanks for the ministry he’s started and grown at the Kirk in the last five years. Here’s a reminder of what he has done in the last 5 years:

*“In my first few months here, we planted the seeds of an online option for worship participation.  Back then, some argued that it would keep people from coming to church - but we planted anyway.  We could never have imagined how that seed would blossom with necessity when the pandemic hit in 2020.*

*Soon after that, through a comprehensive listening campaign, we planted the seeds of a new vision - a vision that turned us toward a capital campaign for our 75th anniversary, a campaign that blossomed into the most successful capital campaign in the history of the church.  We shouldn’t be surprised - this is a tremendously generous congregation - boasting large budget surpluses in every year that I have been here and adding about $7 million dollars to our church’s endowment that now sits at roughly $34 million.*

*We planted seeds of new traditions over the last five years - like our homecoming picnic, like the Kirkin of the Tartan, like candlelight on Christmas Eve, like taking pilgrimages, like honoring our veterans, like doing advent devotionals as a congregation, like prioritizing small groups, like organizing an annual service challenge, like establishing an annual mission conference … the seeds of these new traditions are blooming.  I can’t wait to watch how they continue to grow.*

*We planted seeds of new branches of our ministry.  Beyond the online ministry born largely from the pandemic, we have a branch at Fox Run that we call “Kirk West” and important connecting with four other local presbyterian churches that we call a “cooperative parish.”  The seeds are planted … and we can be proud of how they are coming up out of the ground.”*

Share your personal joys and concerns as well as those you have for the church as we move into a time of transition. Pray for one another and the church.