

Father's Day

June 17, 2018

Our Savior's Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Mann

When does a miracle become invisible?—A miracle becomes invisible when it becomes commonplace. Today, we are going to talk about one of the most common miracles of life—the miracle of a seed. A month ago I planted my garden seeds. Today, the marigolds are about an inch high, the tomatoes are doing well, and the zucchinis are up. It's a miracle—and it happens every spring! Can you imagine what our first ancestors must have thought when they discovered you can take a hundred seeds that you can hold in your hand, plant them in the soil and feed an entire family (or in the case of zucchini can feed an entire town)?

This morning, we are looking at two parables of Jesus. We are in Mark 4. Both parables are about seeds. The first parable is the Parable of the Sower. A farmer sows his seeds in the soil. Miracle of miracles the seeds sprout and grow. The seeds grow, Jesus says, “automate”—that's a Greek word. “Automate” is where we get the English word “automatically”. The seed grows “by itself”. The farmer doesn't have to do anything to make the seed grow. Later on, of course, the farmer will have to cultivate and water and weed and fertilize. But the seed sprouts all by itself. That's the miracle. The second parable is the Parable of the Mustard Seed. Jesus says-- “although the mustard seed is the smallest seed, when it grows up it is larger than all the other garden plants. Another miracle—something incredibly small becoming incredibly big.

On Father's Day, when you talk about small things becoming big things, it's hard not to think about kids. They grow fast. I see your

children in church and in the blink of an eye they are lanky teenagers and then adults. When Sally and I came to Northern Virginia our oldest son Ben was in 4th grade. The younger two were just starting preschool. Now, they are out on their own, but I can look back and see how they've grown. In my lifetime, I can also look across the span of five generations—four living generations of family—fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, grandparents and grandchildren. It's a wonderful blessing, isn't it?—How God designed it all—the cycle of life. It's miracle. How many of you fathers were in the delivery room for the birth of your children? I can remember being there for the birth of my three sons and then for my first grandson (I was there with the other grandfather for the beginning of my grandson's birth and then the doctor (she was this big black woman and she was not about to put up with any _____ from us) she tossed us out for misbehavior. I can't say that was one of my finest moments as a grandfather—getting thrown out of the delivery room. But the birth of every child is a miracle, isn't it? A miracle from God. And when you think back even before that baby came into the world, to the time and place where two tiny cells came together to form a human embryo. And that microscopic life began to grow—all by itself. It is a wondrous thing! In Psalm 139:13, the psalmist says, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

Do you know who Buzz Bissinger is? He wrote the book *Friday Night Lights*. Then the Billy Bob Thornton movie and the TV show. The book the movie and the TV show were all about Texas football. But in his latest book, Buzz (whose real name is Gerry), he tells the story of a night in August of 1983 when his twin sons were born prematurely. These are a father's words as he caught a first glimpse of his son Zach:

"Doctors and nurses surrounded him in a tight circle. He was a bloody quiver in their hands, born thirteen and a half weeks too soon and weighing one pound and eleven ounces. They held him with their arms high and outstretched almost as if they were offering him as a sacrifice. They held him ever so gently as if he

might break into a thousand pieces or just crumble into dust. His skin was almost translucent. His arms could snap in two like a wishbone. His fingers could break like the point of a pencil. His legs were tissue paper. They knew the odds of his survival were very low. I also knew that if he survived, he would not remotely be the son I wanted. I had little clue about medicine, but it was irrelevant to the obvious—any baby born so many weeks prematurely, with immediate difficulty breathing, looking the way he did like a weightless feather, would suffer long-term effects. Harsh words from a father—“he would not remotely be the son I wanted”. But in his new book, *Father’s Day: A Journey into the Mind and Heart of My Extraordinary Son*, Buzz Bissinger talks about his struggle to come to terms with the radically different destinies of his two sons. Born first, Gerry would grow into a strong and accomplished adult. Deprived of oxygen and delivered three minutes later, Zach would not.

Bissinger writes, “His IQ, which has been measured far too many times, is about 70, with verbal scores in the normal range of 90, performance skills of about 50. I love my son deeply,” he says, “but I do not feel I know him nor do I think I ever will.” He goes on to say, “It is strange to love someone so much who is still so fundamentally mysterious to you after all these years ...” He says, “As much as I try to engage Zach, to figure out how to make the flower germinate because there is a seed (I cannot. It is beyond my power.)”. And then Buzz Bissinger speaks a truth that applies to every father—to every parent. He says, you cannot force the dreams you have for your children into reality. He says, “Being a father is a sundering (a splitting apart, a letting go). One brings something of one’s self into the world, and yet it is not one’s self. It can never be one’s self. Its destiny is to come from the Father, to go out from the Father. It is strange,” he says, “to love someone so much who is still so fundamentally mysterious to you after all these years.”

In Ezekiel 17, God the Father describes his parenting of Israel as a “sundering”—as splitting off a tender shoot and planting it so that

it can “put forth branches and bear fruit and become a majestic cedar.” (Ezekiel 17:22-23). That’s one of the hardest things about being a parent, isn’t it?—the letting go and letting our kids find their own way and letting God do His thing with them—to work in their lives as he has worked in ours. And of course, there’s the Parable of the Mustard Seed—the mystery of a tremendous future hidden in a tiny seed. Only God knows. Only God knows what will come from that seed. The seed grows “automate”, the Bible says, “by itself.” It is such a small statement of truth, but I believe it deeply expresses one of the greatest frustrations I have as a father and as a person—I can’t know and I can’t control the future of my kids. Only God knows. And the God who knows and who is in control—has my children—has all of us in the palm of His hand. And He is a God who loves us and cares for us and has sent his Son Jesus to be our Savior and die for us. Our Father in heaven promises that “He is with us always.” He will be the father that we cannot be.

The miracle of life. It is so common and it happens every day. Seeds scatter. Seeds grow. They do the first in order to accomplish the second. It is a truth every father learns, and one that God has always known.