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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we probably have all seen the GEICO commercial where Pinocchio is leading a Motivational Workshop.

Pinocchio is standing up front, looking out at the roomful of faces, and he says, "I look around this room, and see nothing but untapped potential."

He points to one individual and says, "You have potential."

And his nose starts to grow.

"And, you have poten..." As he realizes his nose is growing, he says, "Uh, oh boy."

PAUSE

I thought of that commercial as I was preparing the sermon for this week.

I was reading the Gospel text for this week, and there was one word that kept coming to my mind—potential, potential, potential.

And all I could see was Pinocchio giving his motivational speech.

PAUSE

This week's Gospel text consists of the Parable of the Sower of Seeds.

A sower went out to sow.

And some seed fell on the path.

And some seed fell on the rocky ground.

And some seed fell among thorns.

And some seed fell on good soil.

We know this Gospel text. We have heard it many times before.

It is a parable about how different people respond differently of the Word of God.

Some hear the Word of God, but the evil one comes and snatches it away.

Some hear the Word of God, but they have no root, and so when trials come, the person immediately falls away.

And, some hear the Word of God, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing in that person.

And some hear the Word of God, and they do indeed bear fruit.

PAUSE

Now, I have to say that when I was thinking about Pinocchio and that commercial, I equated that commercial to the seed in our Gospel reading.

What is a seed? It is potential.

A seed, by definition is a flowering plant's unit of reproduction, capable of developing into another such plant.

That is the definition of a seed.

A seed comes from a plant and it is the potential of that plant to produce another plant like itself.

A seed is "potential."

That what it is in a nutshell, pun intended.

A seed is potential.

And so when we think of that GEICO commercial with Pinocchio, we would say that the human being is depicted as having potential.

Therefore, a human being is like a seed, both have potential.

PAUSE

But, in our Gospel reading, the seed is not a person.

In the parable, the Sower is not scattering people.

No, the people are the different types of environment in which the seed falls—whether on the path, in rocky soil, among thorns, or good soil.

The seed is not the person.

No, the seed in the parable is the Word of God.

And so, it is the Word of God that creates potential in the person.

Let me say that again, it is the Word of God that creates potential in the person.

It is the Word of God that instills potential, or activates potential, or initiates potential, or awakens potential.

Whatever the correct terminology is...

In short, it is the Word of God that makes it so the human being is able to do what a human being empowered by the Gospel is supposed to do.

The Word of God is the potential at work in a human being, so that a human being is able to do what it is supposed to do.

And the parable would seem to suggest that the human being empowered by the Gospel is supposed to evangelize, so as to bear fruit, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

A Gospel-activated person is supposed live up to his or her potential, making converts by the by the 10s and 20s, as much as a hundred new converts.

Indeed, this parable provides a summary of the process of conversion.

A person hears the Word of God, and understands it, and they come to believe.

And that same believing person then bears fruit, by sharing the Word of God with others, who hear it, understand it, and come to believe.

And they bear fruit, and the process goes on and on, like a seed that is planted, germinates, and grows into a plant, which produces seed.

And those seeds then come to be planted, and germinate, and grow into more plants.

And the process goes on.

But to personally be responsible for the conversion of a hundred, or sixty people, or even thirty people even say in the span of one's lifetime can seem like a huge task, especially for those who may not be good at this evangelism sort of thing.

But what if we were to start small?

What if each one of us were to be responsible for the conversion of say only two people in our lifetime, with the stipulation that each of us told our two converts that they too would be responsible for two converts, and their two converts would also be responsible for two converts and so on.

We know the where I am going with this.

We may understand "potential" as a small beginning, but which grows exponentially over time.

This idea is captured beautifully in the Grain of Rice Fable.

It is a story about a girl name Rani who was rewarded by the raja, the Indian king.

Rani is rewarded because she returned some rice that belonged to the king.

The raja asked Rani what reward he could give her.

And so she asked for a single grain of rice, and for each of thirty days she asked him to give her double the amount of rice the day before.

One grain the first day, two the second day, four the third day, and so on.

The raja agreed, but little did he realize that by the 30th day, his obligation to Rani was 536, 870, 912 grains of rice.

Computing all 30 days total, Rani received more than one billions grain of rice.

If you did same math starting with only a penny, you would receive over \$5 million on day 30, and over \$10.7 million dollars total.

So yes, small starts have great potential.

PAUSE

And so, Friends, maybe we don't have to be responsible ourselves for the conversion of 100 people, or 60 people, or even 30 people.

Maybe we should simply start with just two, and in only seven cycles of the conversion process—of individuals hearing the Word of God, understanding it, believing it, and sharing it themselves with others...

With only seven cycles of the conversion process, we will be well over one hundred converts...one hundred plus individuals whom we might attribute to our original efforts.

PAUSE

Being responsible for two converts in our life time seems very doable.

But there are an additional two points that I want to make about our potential as Christians.

The first point is this.

The Sower of the Seed in our Gospel's parable is not frugal, but is overgenerous in the broadcasting the seed.

The sower is not reserved, but is over-excessive in distributing the seed.

The sower is scattering seed all over the place—much of it falls on places where it doesn't grow, where it fails to yield any fruit.

In other words, we, as purveyors of God's Word are called to broadcast that Word of God far and wide.

We are called to share the Good News of Christ in many and various lives, with the hope that at least in some lives the Good News will take root and bear fruit.

We hope that the Good News of Christ would bear fruit in many people's lives, but we recognize that in many people's lives it just won't.

Notice that in three fourths of the seed in the Gospel lesson fail to yield fruit, because it falls on the path, or on rocky soil, or in the thorns.

So we are to broadcast the seed of God's Word far and wide, but we shouldn't be discouraged if we find little success.

It is tough being a sower of God's Word.

Potential however starts small, like a seed, and if even just two people respond, well then that is something.

PAUSE

The second point I want to make is this.

Potential starts small, but it also...it also starts with God's love.

In I Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul also talks about what we Christians are supposed to do.

The Gospel-activated person is supposed to live up to his or her potential, and the apostle Paul tells us that our potential begins with God's love.

If we do or say anything without God's love as our motivation, Paul says we are noisy gong or a clanging symbol.

We just make noise.

If we speak in the tongues of mortals and even in the tongues of angels, but do not have love, we are nothing.

If we do great acts of kindness...

If we selflessly give away all our possessions, and even hand over our very body in service to God and our neighbor, and yet do not have love, we gain nothing.

God's love is that which should motivate everything and anything we do as Christian people.

Our potential as Christian people goes down to zero, if we do not do what we do and say what we say out of love.

Think about that...without God's love motivating us, Paul says we have no potential as God's people.

So, in terms of evangelism, we start small, not thinking about the 30, or 60, or 100 people we would hope to evangelize.

We think about maybe just one or two people, whom God has put in our lives.

We think about the one or two people, whom we can give witness to God's love.

We don't have to knock these one or two people over the head with the Gospel message.

We don't have to say, "Let me tell you about how God in Jesus Christ died on the cross to save you of your sins."

No, all we have to do is sincerely be God's love to them.

All we have to do is offer ourselves to them, even as God our Father offered himself to us in his Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus selflessly gave of himself for all of creation and for all humanity.

Certainly, we can give of ourselves, so as to affect at least one or two people.

PAUSE

Start small, and let God's love work God's grace through you.

And so, I look out at this gathered group of people, and all I see is amazing potential.

You have potential. You have potential. You have potential. I have potential.

Why? Because God Word is sown in us. We have heard it. We have understood it. And we have believed.

And we will bear fruit.

We have potential. That is for certain. My nose is not growing.

Amen.