

## Sunday Lesson – June 13, 2021

**GOSPEL: Mark 4: 26 - 34**

### ***A Discontinuous Miracle***

#### **Background**

“In today’s Gospel, Jesus uses parables of the growth of a seed to describe the Kingdom of God. In both parables, seeds, once scattered and sown, grow on their own accord. In the first parable, the scattered seeds yield fruit, and Jesus proclaims that the harvest has come. In the second, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to the smallest of seeds: the mustard seed. When this seed is sown, it grows to be one of the largest plants, a plant which provides shade for the birds of the sky. Jesus seems to imply that like a mustard seed, the Kingdom of God has humble beginnings on Earth, but will soon grow to be larger than all else.

Today’s reading challenges us to find the potential and the beauty in the little things. Just as a mustard seed grows into a large, beautiful plant, the smallest of actions and occurrences may be the beginnings of something much bigger. The Kingdom of God exists in the smallest of seeds: a child’s laugh, a sunshine-y day, a “hello” to a stranger, a sharing of one’s faith story, a sharing of a meal, an acknowledgement of someone’s humanity – the list goes on. Where can we find the Kingdom of God today? Let us foster its growth and find comfort in its shade!”

*(Excerpts from*

*onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Students/2011-2012%20Reflections/s061712.html)*

#### **Insight**

“Parables are comparisons, meant to cast two things alongside one another to provide analogy, contrast, or reflection — usually a reflection similar to the distortions that appear in a funhouse mirror. Jesus’ parables, whether they are brief aphorisms or



short narratives, have a way of reordering conventional assumptions and values. They don’t explain *how* one is supposed to recognize the reign of God, but they make it clear that we will need to adopt or receive new ways of perceiving.

Mark introduces the two parables in Mark 4:26-32 with explicit mention of “the kingdom of God.” The parables illuminate — or perhaps obfuscate (see 4:11-12) — aspects of God’s reign. In both stories, Jesus speaks about seeds (a common metaphor for formation and education in ancient contexts) to indicate that God’s new order will take root and eventually come to fruition, whether people desire it or not.

It bears mentioning that Mark’s outlook on the reign of God will not endorse a passive stance on our part. While there is something inevitable about God’s deliverance, still other passages in Mark call would-be disciples to participate in the Christ’s activity. In short, there is no gospel in which Jesus remains buried in the ground like a dormant seed.” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-11-2/commentary-on-mark-426-34-4)*

#### **Gospel Reading**

“Then Jesus said, “God’s kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows—he has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without his help: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. When the grain is fully formed, he reaps—harvest time! “How can we picture God’s kingdom? What kind of story can we use? It’s like an acorn. When it lands on the ground it is quite small as seeds go, yet once it is planted it grows into a huge oak tree with thick branches. Eagles nest in it.” With many stories like these, he presented his message to them, fitting the stories to their experience and maturity. He was never without a story when he spoke. When he was alone with his disciples, he went over everything, sorting out the tangles, untying the knots.” *The Message*

### What It Could Mean?

“This discontinuous, mysterious nature of the seed is part of what Mark wants to get at with his parabolic comparison with the Kingdom of God. A seed once planted is a mystery being revealed. It unfolds by its own operation in the soil. Planters may sleep and rise, but a seed’s work is automatic, as the Greek word in Mark 4:28 suggests. What’s apocalyptic about seed growth? For Mark, it is its likeness to cosmic timetables. As New Testament scholar Joel Marcus points out, the automatic sequence of a seed first sprouting, showing a head, and then yielding seed became a commonplace of apocalyptic literature for how divine transformation happens. The emergence of the seed in its sequenced growth is like the Kingdom of God in this sense: it grows mysteriously of its own accord and appears on God’s timetable (not yours or mine). God’s divine reign is apocalyptic and automatic and on a divine timetable, like the growth of a seed.

But in Mark 4, the seed metaphors just keep on coming. The mustard seed parable in verses 30-32 seeks to explicate the apocalyptic mystery in one further sense: the seed’s growth also appears and spreads “all of a sudden.” Mustard seeds have the beautiful quality of being small but with the ability to spread and take over a field—in Mark’s text, sprawling enough to include shade for all those gentile birds of heaven, too! The mustard plant is short, scruffy, and small; but it is also in Mark’s sanctified imagination sprawling and sufficient for shade—just like this mysterious Kingdom of God.

This is where Mark’s mysterious seed text meets us, and its vision of growth even more so if we are optimistic moderns. We may not be apocalyptic people, but we will gladly tag along for a little harvest joy with our seed. The image gives us hope in the seed’s own automatic trajectory of growth. Whatever the Kingdom of God is, it is indeed like a seed that grounds our hope that eventually things can change. The moral universe has

a bending arc to point you toward it. That kind of hope can get you through a difficult patch. And so even Jesus’ seedy kingdom sounds good enough to people like us.

Now that is mysterious and even a little revealing. Even so, there is one thing I now lay hold of. There may well be an arc of the moral universe that bends toward justice, but that modern view is for us both a promise and a goal. For we, thanks to Mark, are people who even now glimpse germinating seeds yielding bouquets of humanity: a surprising, sudden, fragile yield of the Kingdom’s mysterious grace and justice.” *(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org by David Schnasa Jacobsen)*

### Readings for Further Study

- [Luke 10:2](#) “*At the proper time, the Word will bring forth fruit its fruit, and the Lord of the Harvest will be glorified*”
- [1 Corinthians 3:6/Acts 5: 38-39/Ezekiel 17: 22-23](#) *No one could stop God’s Word*

### Thought for the Day

”I think faith is the small mustard seed of opportunities every day. For example, ‘Am I going to love this person? Am I going to share my faith with this person? Am I going to pray that little prayer?’ It really is a daily thing where you seize those little mustard seed opportunities and then see what God does.”

~ *Mark Batterson*

### A Prayer

Steer the ship of my life, good Lord, to your quiet harbour, where I can be safe from the storms of sin and conflict. Show me the course I should take. Renew in me the gift of discernment, so that I can always see the right direction in which I should go. And give me the strength and the courage to choose the right course, even when the sea is rough and the waves are high, knowing that through enduring hardship and danger, in your name, we shall find comfort and peace. **Amen.**

~ *St Basil of Ceasarea*