

Eleventh Sunday of the Year B

Mark 4:26-34

26 Jesus said to the crowds: 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man throws seed on the land. 27 Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. 28 Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. 29 And when the crop is ready, he loses no time: he starts to reap because the harvest has come.'

30 He also said, 'What can we say the kingdom of God is like? What parable can we find for it? 31 It is like a mustard seed which at the time of sowing in the soil is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all and puts out big branches so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade.'

33 Using many parables like these, he spoke the word to them, so far as they were capable of understanding it. 34 He would not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything to his disciples when they were alone.

Other readings: Ezekiel 17:22-24 Psalm 91 (92) 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

The evangelist Mark gathers together several of the parables of Jesus in what becomes chapter 4 of his gospel. Three of these parables speak of the growth of a seed. The parable of the sower, which comes at the start of the chapter, considered different responses to the preaching of the word of God. The parables before us now are concerned with other aspects of growth.

The first of our parables, known as the parable of 'the seed growing secretly' is unique to Mark, found in no other gospel. Its meaning is clear. Jesus is saying that the work of the kingdom of God is mysterious and profound. We do not understand how God works in the world, and within the human heart. But the work of God will achieve its purpose. The harvest will come, provided we do not thwart it. Our second parable, the parable of the mustard seed, shows another dimension. The mustard seed is tiny, but the growth of the kingdom is great. The kingdom, like the mustard shrub, provides shelter and shade. The kingdom of God provides support and sustenance.

Mark ends this section of parables by speaking of Jesus' purpose in using parables. His intention was not to confuse but to explain the work of God in the world and in the human heart. Those who are open to understanding will gradually come to know more. The work of the grace of Christ is slow but deep.

Why did Jesus use parables?

Which parables of Jesus are most memorable for you?

Pray for a deeper understanding of the message of Jesus.

Pray for the patience to let the grace of Jesus work in your heart.