



Mark 4:26-34

"Sowing Good Seed"

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I have come to dearly love the parables of the kingdom — all those rich metaphors for how God works in the world, in us, through us, and in spite of us. I love them even when, like this week, the lectionary wrenches them from their context.

This week's parables come in Jesus' sermon by the seaside, after He told and explained the Parable of the Sower. The Gospels tell us that He often preached about the kingdom. I imagine the people pestering Him, day after day, to tell them what the kingdom of God is *really* like.

So Jesus tries to explain, again and again, trying to make comparisons they can understand. This week Jesus tries two images:

1. The kingdom is like someone who tosses out some seed and hopes for the best.

The kingdom farmer scatters seeds. Then he waits around.

This farmer has no idea how seeds grow, but he's happy to reap the harvest.

This comes in contrast to the contents of my mailbox as a pastor.

Every day I have shiny fliers and catalogs from the ministry machines. They offer me seemingly guaranteed success through their techniques.

- This VBS program
- That small group ministry
- The other evangelism plan

They are produced by people so very confident that they have “The Answers.” They seem to be doing the work of the kingdom — but in Mark chapter 4, Jesus says a key characteristic of the kingdom is the utter mystery of its growth.

- Someone scatters seeds.
- He then promptly ignores it.
- The seeds do their thing and grow.

And as verse 27 so humilatingly put it, **“he does not know how.”** What?

It just happens. That’s how the earth works. You put good seed in good soil and **SURPRISE!** Stuff grows. The lucky farmer (the blessed farmer?) who tossed seeds around later happily harvests the crop.

That’s kingdom ministry.

- Do the good work.
- Preach the Word.
- Love the people.
- Hang out and wait.
- Stuff grows.

If you claim you really know how it works, you are being unbiblical. The biblical view of kingdom ministry? The farmer is steadfastly ignorant of basic principles.

Imagine the denominational newspaper reporter: “When asked how Skyline Presbyterian Church succeeded, the minister asserted that “she does not know how.”

It is easy to get overburdened with one’s own importance in ministry. After all, I am the one with “The Vision”, I tell myself — and anyone who will listen. I am doing Big Important Things.

Jesus says the kingdom is not a matter of doing Big Important Things. The kingdom is little stuff growing as it should.

2. The kingdom is like a tiny, insignificant seed, that takes root and becomes something remarkable.

Kingdom work is the planting of small unimportant seeds. The tiniest seed. That's all we plant. God does the rest. To quote Jesus , **we do not know how.**"

We plant a seed.

- The seed is good.
- The soil is good.
- The rains fall.
- The sun shines.
- Stuff grows.

We can tell it is kingdom work, not because we planted something wonderful, or because we're good planters.

No, we see that it is kingdom work because something wonderful grows — something quite separate from us and our perception.

The mustard seed grows and becomes totally unlike the seed. And it becomes useful in enormously surprising ways. It provides space and safety for other things to grow.

So we plant seeds.

- We tell the stories of the faith to our children and to each other.
- We tell the stories of our faith to our children and to each other.
- We tell how God has changed us, we tell them of our times of doubt and how God brought us through.
- We tell them of the times we saw bring what looked like a miracle.
- We pray with our children and with each other.
- We pray for our children and for each other.

- The soil is good.
- The rains come down, as does the sun.
- Stuff grows.
- We do not know how.

But we'll watch to see them grow big and strong.

We'll watch to see how our children do things that matter in the world because they have watched us do things that matter in the world.

We pray that we all someday provide space and safety for others to grow and thrive.