

GOSPEL READING FOR JUNE 14, 2015

START WITH SCRIPTURE: Mark 4:26-34

OBSERVE:

Jesus uses parables to illustrate his teaching, particularly about the kingdom of God. A parable connects with the listener on a concrete level, using familiar experiences and images with which they can identify.

The first parable in this passage is fairly direct. The kingdom of God is compared to seed scattered in the field that grows and matures concealed from sight, and then finally is harvested.

Note that Jesus is focusing here on the mysterious nature of the kingdom. Like the grain, it grows even after the sower has sown it, and while he is unaware of its progress: *Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.* Ultimately, though, there is the hint of judgment – the harvest: *“As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”*

Likewise the kingdom of God begins simply, and grows, and then comes to final harvest on the Day of the Lord.

In the second parable, Jesus speaks of the mustard seed, which he says is *the smallest of all seeds on earth.* Yet it grows to become the largest of the plants in the garden. In other words, however humbly or small the kingdom begins, it will inevitably become magnificent.

Finally, Mark’s Gospel makes clear that Jesus is seeking to accommodate the understanding of the people by telling them parables. Like a wise teacher, he knows when to give his students a break: *With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand.*

To his disciples, he interpreted the hidden meanings of his parables.

APPLY:

There are two applications I’d like to touch on: the purpose of the parable, and the general meaning of these particular parables.

There seems to be dual purpose to the parables Jesus teaches. On the one hand they connect to simple, everyday experiences. But on the other hand, they seem to exceed the initial understanding of many who hear them, including the most erudite among them — the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

Jesus tells his disciples *“The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that,”*

*‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,
and ever hearing but never understanding;
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’ ” (Mark 4:11-12).*

To those who are open to spiritual insights, the parables may become clear; but to those who are stubborn and closed minded, they remain a mystery.

The second application I'd like to make is this: Jesus is telling us something very important about the nature of the kingdom of God, and our experience of it. We may tend to expect impressive magnificence.

But Jesus is conveying the truth that the kingdom of God doesn't necessarily come in great displays, or with impressive beginnings. In fact, the kingdom will come in slow, gradual measures until one day it becomes a universal reality.

This is a counter-narrative to the oft quoted descriptions of the kingdom of God as a sudden, cataclysmic event. Both views are present in scripture, but perhaps we can reconcile the two by realizing that both are true.

What Jesus is saying is that the kingdom of God is already present, all around us, just as the seed is concealed and yet growing despite being hidden. Then, one day, the reality of the kingdom of God is revealed as the most dominant reality of them all. In that day what has always been true and real will be revealed, and "every eye will see" (*Revelation 1:7*).

RESPOND:

There must always be a certain level of humility when it comes to understanding biblical and spiritual truth. We must always assume that there is more to learn.

In these parables, I am reminded that the kingdom of God is already present; one day it will be revealed to all people everywhere.

We must live in the time between the *now* of the kingdom, that God's love and grace are already present among us; and the *not yet*, when the kingdom will be fully and finally revealed everywhere and to everyone.

Lord, open my eyes to see the evidence of your kingdom that is all around me. Your kingdom is here, and it is coming. Prepare me now and forever! Amen!

BY TOM LETCHWORTH

<https://soarlectionarybiblestudy.wordpress.com/2015/06/15/gospel-for-june-14-2015/>