



42B PENTECOST 3B – BIBLE STUDY

Small is beautiful

Abstract

Again, he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

Mark 4:32-33

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OLD TESTAMENT

Ezekiel 17:22–24

²² “ ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. ²³ On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. ²⁴ All the trees of the forest will know that I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish.

“ ‘I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.’ ”

NEW TESTAMENT

2 Corinthians 5:6–10 (11–13) 14–17

⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

¹⁴ For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

GOSPEL

Mark 4:26–34

²⁶ He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces grain— first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. ²⁹ As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

³⁰ Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. ³² Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

³³ With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. ³⁴ He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything. ⁱ

respond

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

42B Pentecost 3B – Bible Study

Small is beautiful

SUNDAY, JUNE 13, 2021 | AFTER PENTECOST | PROPER 6 YEAR B

Old Testament & Psalm, Option I

Old Testament 1 Samuel 15:34–16:13

Psalm Psalm 20

or

Old Testament & Psalm, Option II

Old Testament Ezekiel 17:22–24

Psalm Psalm 92:1–4, 12–15

New Testament 2 Corinthians 5:6–10 (11–13) 14–17

Gospel Mark 4:26–34ⁱⁱ

Jesus tells two stories about seeds, reminding us that it is from small beginnings, and through organic growth, that the kingdom comes about.

This week's reading, Mark 4.26-34, provides us with an opportunity to:

- appreciate that disciples have to wrestle to understand parables
- recognise that Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God to us in parables
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- consider the impact of small actions.

This is week two of the seven-week theme: Following the footsteps where we explore who Mark's Jesus is and ask what it means to become his apprentice.ⁱⁱⁱ

Opening prayer

Creator God,

we bring to you all that is growing within us:

We bring our prayers for the spread of your kingdom:

We bring the initiatives for justice multiplying among nations:

We bring the hopes and dreams, tiny and big,

of all your children around the world:

for you to bless and nurture.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Read the Passage

Mark 4:26–34

Bible notes

Jesus uses images of plants and trees in his parables. This is surely much more significant than simply borrowing from the scenery around him. He could have talked about carpentry and building, for instance, and yet he talks about plants and growth.

The abiding image for the kingdom of God is growth, not construction. Growth is silent. It continues day and night. There is still a mystery and wonder around how a seed becomes a mature plant, even now that we understand DNA and photosynthesis. It is still astonishing that new life germinates, and we are still reliant on this natural process for our staple foods. All our skill at farming and food production is predicated on this natural force.

These two parables suggest the kingdom of God also has this tremendous growing energy, similar to the emerging life of a seed. We seem to have little to contribute to the process, beyond initially sowing the seed and perhaps taking care of the plant. The earth and the seed together produce the mature plants, and this happens whether the grower is awake or asleep. The mustard seed grows to become a huge shrub, with room for the birds in its shade (reminiscent of the tree in Ezekiel 17.23). This is what the kingdom of God is like, growing mysteriously and wonderfully.

This is not the only image of the kingdom of God in the parables of Jesus: there are also family relationships, work colleagues, things that happen at wedding feasts and things that are lost, among others. But this cluster of parables reminds us of the mysterious energy secretly at work in the world – not only the Church – to produce the growth of God’s kingdom.

Reflection

How do we view Christians that we disagree with? How can we affirm that ‘everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new’ if they hold values that we deeply disagree with? This is a big challenge and may strain the bonds of fellowship. Interestingly, Paul makes this assertion in the middle of a series of letters full of frank disagreements. So, he is not recommending ‘saccharin sweetness’ but more honest relationships. Maybe part of the answer lies in Jesus’ parables: if we catch a vision of the kingdom persistently growing, we can have the courage to play our part faithfully, knowing that it is not all about us.

Picture Points of reflection

- What do you like or dislike about this ‘environment’?
- What helps you to flourish?
- Where do you see God’s kingdom-values at work in your community?



Prayer

A prayer of adoration

God of mystery,
 Sower, Saviour, Spirit,
 we worship you;
 and we ask you to give us:
 eyes to notice where the seeds of your kingdom are growing,
 courage to show them to others,

faith enough to help nurture them,
and a heart that delights in their harvest
Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Go in peace to love and serve God's world.
It is beautiful and you are part of it.
It is our sacred commission to help God love it.
Amen.

Faith in action.

Choose one action or habit to work on this week, that will help to create an environment in which
God's kingdom values can flourish in your life and in your patch of planet earth.

i Revised Common Lectionary. (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

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