

## **“Harvesttime”**

In Mark 4:26-34, Jesus uses agricultural imagery to describe the Kingdom of God. In the parable of the seed growing of itself, (vv.26-29), the Sower is not involved with the subsequent growth of the seed. It grows and produces of itself. One might fixate on the Sower as passive. However, the focus should be on the certainty of growth, regardless of how active the Sower might be.

Even though it might not be so obvious, the Kingdom of God is being established on earth---it has been present ever since Jesus’ ministry. The parable suggests that the kingdom can be present even before the presence of the ripe fruit. The fact that the fruit will ripen and there will be a second coming of Christ and complete establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth gives hope to the faithful. This parable can also be used as a word of consolation for those who feel that God delays decisive action. Those of faith need the assurance that there will be a harvest, a Kingdom of God on earth.

Why do we need this assurance? We plant the seed, witness for Christ, but sometimes the fruit does not come as fast as we would like. Our get rich quick, have success quick culture may cause us to question our faith and turn to other ways to get things done. If we are not careful, our lives can be taken over by our culture’s demands for success. We get discouraged, can fall into a rut, and religion

can become no more than a holiday accessory. Our situation is compounded by the fact that our faith is constantly being met with hostility.

Faced with disbelief among their communities and families, many lifelong Christians have become discouraged. Parents and Grandparents ask themselves anxiously what they have done wrong in bringing up their children. Faced with difficulty in maintaining a vibrant faith community in today's world, many begin to wonder if the effort is worth it.

The parable of the seed growing provides encouragement. Despite the rigorous opposition to the word, it still yields a rich harvest. The Kingdom of God will be established on earth. This will be when the reign of God fully takes place. It will be God's time when all the world will accept the will of God. God's will finally will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

As discussed by the commentator William Barclay, the parable of the seed gives us several truths. First, it illustrates the helplessness of human beings and their need for God. The farmer (humans) does not make the seed grow. No human has ever possessed the secret of life. Humans can make a situation in the world where it is given opportunity to come more fully and speedily, but behind all things is God and the power and the will of God.

Second, the image of a certain harvest from invisible beginnings promises that even though our testimony to the Gospel appears insignificant or even fruitless, Christians should not be discouraged or give up. Nature's growth is often imperceptible. We do not see a plant grow every day. When we go away and come back after a while, we see the growth. This is the same way with the Kingdom of God. Over the years the growth is plain. While man sleeps, growth goes on.

Third, nature's growth is inevitable. There is nothing to prevent its growth. A tree can split a concrete pavement with the power of its growth. I once had the roots of a tree in my yard break the sewer pipes to my house. This power is so with the Kingdom of God. In spite of man's rebellion and disobedience, God's work goes on. It cannot be stopped. The seed harvest points to the certain harvest that stems from next to invisible beginnings. Christians should beware of the mania which dominates modern life for statistics as evidence of success or failure. God's kingdom will be established. Do not fall prey to human standards to gauge God's work.

Fourth, there is a consummation of history. There is a day when the harvest comes. When the harvest is ripe, it will be time for the reaper. As soon as the ripe grain appears, the reaper comes to harvest the grain; harvesting is a symbol for the

final judgment. Two things happen---the good fruit is gathered in and the weeds and tares are destroyed. Harvest and judgment go hand in hand.

When we think of the coming day of judgement, Barclay writes that we need to consider three things. First, it is a summons to patience. God has all the time he wants to work. Instead of engaging in our petulant, irritable hastiness, we should cultivate in our souls the patience we learn while we wait on God.

Second, it is a summons to hope. We can choose to live in an atmosphere of despair. So many people today feel that for humanity the game is up. But no person can think like that and believe in God. If God is the God we believe Him to be, there is no room for pessimism in life. This hope of harvesttime can be used a word of consolation for those who feel that God delays decisive action and is not acting quick enough.

Third, it is a summons to preparedness. We must be ready for the consummation of history. It is too late to prepare when the final judgment is upon us. The seed growing secretly may be a warning against the suddenness of the coming judgment. No one knows when the hour will come. Human actions neither hasten or delay the coming of the kingdom which began in Jesus' ministry. When it does arrive, it will be manifested for all.

The second seed parable in vv. 30-32 has imagery of small, apparently insignificant seeds, being transformed into mature plants. This parable highlights the function of the full-grown plant. The small mustard seed grows into a plant that is so large that the bush provides shelter for birds to nest on the ground under its large branches. As bushes go, the mustard bush is the greatest. It represents the Kingdom of God. Jesus may have used this parable to counter the impression that God's rule had to appear among the great and powerful. In fact, God's rule starts with the small mustard seed.

The parable of the mustard seed tells us to never be daunted by small beginnings. Although we may not notice the growth of the kingdom, God is always at work. He uses us, whether we realize it or not. Think of how God has used our creativity to extend lives on earth. In 1900, the average life expectancy was 40 years old. One reason it was so low was that so many people died from diseases. The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought research and development of many vaccines and antibiotics to combat these diseases. I watched a program recently where scientists stated that a child born today can expect to live to 103 years old. What a grand statement of how God is working towards bringing the kingdom of God on earth.

As we close today, let us continue to do God's work, even if we do not see immediate results or if we encounter obstacles. Let us have the assurance that if we

Rev. W. Wallace Culp, III  
Latimer Memorial United Methodist Church  
June 13, 2021

live in patience which cannot be defeated, in hope which cannot despair, and in preparation which ever sees life in the light of eternity, we shall, by the grace of God, be ready for God's consummation and kingdom on earth when it comes.