

Daily Discipleship

Sunday, June 12-18 (B) – Mark 4: 26-34

The Choices of Discipleship: *Growth or Decay?*

Focus Question: *How has your faith grown in the last month?*

word of life

“[The kingdom of God] is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” Mark 4:31-32 (NRSV)

Read Mark 4:26-34

The Gospel of Mark begins with the pronouncement by Jesus, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:15) God’s kingdom is the fulfillment of God’s glorious reign over all of the earth and heaven. Some in Jesus’ day began to expect the fullness of God’s reign to come through Jesus in his lifetime on earth.

1. *Describe your understanding of the kingdom of God.*

In order to help listeners understand more about the kingdom of God, Jesus tells parables. Unfortunately, parables don’t always make the point absolutely clear, and sometimes the disciples are baffled. They request further explanation. Each parable seems to give a glimpse at the teaching of Jesus, but does not provide the sole summary. (An example can be found in Mark 4:1-20.)

2. *Why do you think Jesus taught with parables?*

Mark’s gospel records only three parables, all found in the fourth chapter of Mark. This week’s gospel lesson includes two of the parables. Each uses a common object of a seed and offers a unique perspective on the kingdom of God.

The parable of the harvest describes the process of planting, waiting for the growth and harvesting the grain. (Mark 4:26-29) After the sower has planted the seeds, his or her work is nearly done until harvesting. Even with fertilizing, watering, and caring for the plants, it is out of the hands of humans. Growth is part of the mysterious blessing of God. That’s true with the kingdom of God. Sometimes, it just doesn’t look like much is happening in God’s kingdom on this earth. It’s easy to get impatient. God’s schedule is not ours. But when the harvest is ready, be ready.

3. *What is the message of Jesus in this parable?*
4. *What are disciples called to plant for God’s kingdom?*

The next parable compares the kingdom of God to a mustard seed. (Mark 4:30-32) This smallest of the smallest seeds has the capacity to grow into a shrub big enough for birds to nest in it. Nothing is impossible with God. This parable offers encouragement for those impatient for the coming of God’s reign.

5. *What is the message of Jesus in this parable?*
6. *What is the role of human effort in building the kingdom of God?*
7. *How might this parable be misunderstood?*
8. *How do these parables give you hope?*

word among us

Sophia loved flowers, so she couldn't resist purchasing several potted flowers at the outdoor café. She bought two - one for herself and one for her mother. Yet, even as she bought the flowers she knew the outcome. Sophia needed to enjoy the gorgeous blooms during the coming days, because no matter what she did to nurture the plants, she knew the plant would wither and die. But her mother's plant would flourish and grow for years.

1. *What is your experience with plants?*
2. *Any tips for Sophia?*

Jesus told several parables about seeds. The parable describing the process of planting seeds is familiar. Most of us have attempted to plant seeds, so we can relate to it. In this parable, Jesus gives more than a lesson in gardening. He is talking about the kingdom of God. Take a few moments to consider God's kingdom coming to fruition in your faith community.

3. *How would you describe God's work in your faith community?*
4. *Is this a time of waiting, germinating, bearing fruit or harvesting?*

As humans, we can get caught up in thinking the harvest of discipleship is "our" show. There is a balance between our working for the coming of God's kingdom and God's Spirit stirring people to faith-filled responses. Growth in discipleship is God's work as the Spirit moves us to a response of faith. Yet, we need to be cautious about becoming complacent about evangelism, believing it is all in God's hand and thus never inviting anyone to a deeper understanding or growth in Christ.

5. *How do you keep the balance between human action and God's action?*
6. *How is God calling you to be a partner in God's kingdom-building?*

The second parable is about a small mustard seed which produces a great shrub, large enough for a nesting bird. Sometimes, we in the church can get discouraged. God just doesn't work quickly enough. It has been over 2000 years since Jesus walked on this earth. How soon will God's kingdom come to fulfillment?

7. *What do you find encouraging about this parable?*

Once more, we have choices about following Christ. The choice of discipleship includes growth or decay. Yet, the critical piece is the connection to Christ, allowing the Holy Spirit to be at work creating, growing, nurturing and providing a harvest of good fruit. These parables are not just for the faith community, but have significance for us as individuals.

8. *What is the message of these parables for you during the coming week?*

Prayer

Gracious God, plant your seed in my heart and grow a mustard tree of faith in my spirit. Amen

Dig Deeper

Mark 4:1-20

last word

This week,
plant a seed
and wait upon the Lord.



Daily Discipleship

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