

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 6
Year B

Ezekiel 17:22-24
Psalm 92:1-4, 11-14
2 Corinthians 5:6-17
Mark 4:26-34

In the Gospel reading, Jesus returns to one of His favorite themes, seeds. Perhaps He uses this theme because the people listening to Him understand agricultural ideas. This fourth chapter of Mark's Gospel contains three parables related to seeds, two of which are in today's reading. What are we to make of these parables and what do they say to us?

Much has been written about how to interpret the sayings relating to seeds. Some commentators go so far as to say they cannot be explained, don't even try. However, there are some good commentaries that give ideas to explore. One such directly reflects what we see in these two parables - what is the role of mankind in the work of God's Kingdom and what must we leave up to God?

In our first parable, it is clear that the spreading of the seed, the Word of God, is the task of "*anthropos*". The Greek word is properly translated humanity or human, clearly reflecting our role. We are challenged by Jesus to spread the Gospel message throughout the world. Not only does He say that here, but in many other places, including His final charge to the disciples. How we spread the Word is left up to us, depending on the situation in which we find ourselves. However, what happens after the seed is spread is unknown to us - it is a mystery that only God can know. This is why Jesus says the seed matures on its own. We are told, in this parable, to plant the seed and then not worry about it as what happens next is up to God.

This waiting upon God to act can be frustrating. Patience is not always a virtue we exhibit well. But, clearly, that is what Jesus is calling us to do - wait upon God's timing. That is the nature of the Kingdom of God.

The second parable, the well-known story about the mustard seed, gives us another look at the kingdom of God and how it challenges us. The inner workings of God's Kingdom are not for us to understand. God can use anything, even one of the smallest seeds, to create the Kingdom. Whether it is carefully planted in a garden or just dropped inadvertently, God can take that seed and make it into a mighty bush.

If we look at the history of the Jesus Movement, it began small - just a few followers traveling around the countryside with Jesus became the largest religious movement in the history of the world. Was it a nice, smooth growth chart? No, there were many setbacks, even during the ministry of Jesus. Many found His teachings too difficult and went away. Others were more concerned about their daily lives and businesses to commit to being disciples. Still others followed at a distance because of fear of the authorities. Yet, after the outpouring of the Spirit on

the Day of Pentecost, things began to happen and the Church grew. Again, it wasn't a steady growth, but a slow gradual increase as the disciples spread out and told more people about Jesus.

As we look around, we may feel a little discouraged at the number of people in the pews. We may remember back to a time when there were more people with us. However, it is not our role to convince people they should be sitting here with us. Our job is to spread the Good News, to love all with whom we come into contact, and to care for all - in other words, spread the Gospel message through words and deeds. We don't know how God acts, just as we don't understand how a seed germinates and becomes a plant. What we do know is that the God we serve does know how to make these things happen and has promised to be with us through everything.

Like the farmer who plants the seed, we must wait for God to bring the maturity of the crop. Then, we can join the farmer in the harvest. Then, it is time for us to get to work. The plant, the Church, will grow to provide for the needs of all who come to us. We just need to be ready, with our spiritual sickles in hand, to stride into the field for the harvest. That is our role - spread the seed and wait upon the harvest time. God will do the rest.