

## **Sermon from Sunday June 3<sup>rd</sup> – Mark 4:21-34 – Andreas**

The passage from Mark's Gospel that we read for today seems to be made up of random pieces.

In order to fully appreciate the message Mark is communicating in the passage that we read, we have to look back to the parable of the sower and the seed.

We looked at the first half of Mark ch. 4 three weeks ago. There is a clear development of thought from the first half of ch. 4 to our text today but the meaning and message of the passage for today only becomes clear when read in connection and contrast to the parable of the sower and the seed.

When looking at the parable of the sower and the seed, we discovered that we are confronted with a question:

"who are you?" "what is your response to Jesus?" "Do you bear fruit?"

We also learned that Jesus is like this sower who sows generously.

The sower provides what is necessary for there to be fruit without discriminating between the different kinds of soil.

Which means that we were confronted with the challenge that if we do or do not bear fruit is depended on our response to Jesus.

The people represented by the four different soils all have one thing in common: they hear

The difference between the good soil and the other three is what happens after the hearing.

I pointed out that Following Jesus, being faithful, is an ongoing journey towards the goal of bearing fruit.

God is never troubled by where we are at in the moment. But He invites us onto a journey towards Him.

God raised Jesus from the dead and this God is at work in and through us!!!

This means that the way things are right now is not the way things have to remain.

Do you remember this picture. What is it?

Roman roads and settlement, only see this from the air.

When you are on the ground, the grass growing where the roads and walls used to be looks just the same.

So even when we are like the path, because God is at work in us, we are invited through the parable of the sower and the seed to grow towards the goal of bearing fruit.

I also showed you this icon depicting the parable of the sower and the seed.

This icon shows us in the form of a picture that this parable is about what it means for us to follow Jesus today in our everyday life.

This icon also communicates that bearing fruit like the good soil means becoming more like Jesus.

We are all invited to participate in this life long journey of becoming more like Jesus.

The parables in the second half of Mark ch. 4 that we read for today clarify what it means for each one of us to participate in this journey of growing closer with God.

The focus of the first half of Mark ch. 4 is on the individual person and their response to Jesus' call.

The second half of Mark ch. 4, the passage that we read for today, expands this perspective and explores how we as individual followers of Jesus at any given time fit within the larger picture.

How do we fit into the overall story of Scripture from beginning to end, from creation to new creation?

The different pieces that made up our passage for today are tied together by this idea that something is happening, but it is not obvious!

Things are not necessarily the way they seem, God is at work but How God works may not conform with our expectations.

Before Mark gets to the parables again using the imagery of seeds and growing, He first includes Jesus' saying about the lamp.

Before we get to how we as individual followers fit within the larger picture, Mark first needs to ensure that we are clear about the fact that our understanding of how God works must be shaped and determined by Jesus and not our expectations or anything else.

To that end, Mark includes Jesus' saying about the lamp between the parable of the sower and seed and the parables that we read for today.

Mark 4:21: "He said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand?"

Here is how another translation puts it: 21 "And he said to them, Does the lamp come that it should be put under the bushel or under the couch? [Is it] not that it should be set upon the lamp-stand?"

What is the difference? Lamp object or subject

Take a guess, in the Greek text, is the lamp the object or subject? What would make more sense?

With that in mind, what does the lamp stand for? Any thoughts?

Jesus is the lamp who brings light, Jesus shows us who God is and what God is like! Jesus shows us how God is at work.

**Commented [1]:** in the greek, the lamp is the subject, not the object as in the translation that we read!

Mark 4:21 Darby Translation (DARBY)

21 And he said to them, Does the lamp come that it should be put under the bushel or under the couch? [Is it] not that it should be set upon the lamp-stand?

"Jesus is the lamp of God who has come to bring light and revelation."

**Commented [2]:** Jesus is "the light by which people are enabled to see."

How does this fact that Jesus is the lamp and the subject change our reading of v. 22: "For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light." ?

Jesus being God is not obvious!

Jesus spend time with people, performed many signs and wonders that showed that He is not only from God but one with God.

And yet the very same people who saw Him did not see Jesus for who He is. What God is doing is often not obvious.

But what God does under the surface is for the purpose of disclosing: "Nothing is hidden, except to be disclosed."

In a way, in the person of Jesus, God hides behind the full humanity of Jesus.

And yet, God hides in Jesus so that we can see who God is and what God is like!

Throughout the passage that we read for today we have this notion of something being revealed and at the same time, what we come to see remains hidden.

The way God works and the way God shows up frustrates our desire for certainty.

If you have a lamp in one room of the house, other rooms of the house will not be illuminated by the light of the lamp.

In other words, Jesus' saying that He is the lamp cuts off the option of using simplifications and generalizations to talk about who God is and what it means to follow Jesus.

Jesus is the lamp. What is illuminated by the light of the lamp is determined by the lamp, not by our desire to know what is behind the next door.

Jesus is not like a flashlight in our hands that we get to use and point at whatever we would like to illuminate.

Jesus is not an object but always an acting subject

The lamp is the subject, not us,

again, it is not our desire to know that determines what is illuminated.

Because of that, Jesus says in v. 24 "Pay attention!"

We need to remember this connection to the parable of the sower and the seed.

When looking at the first half of Mark ch. 4 we learned about the importance of hearing and the fact that our response to Jesus determines our understanding of the parable.

Those who accept Jesus' call and follow Him, are described in v. 25: "For to those who have, more will be given."

Now because our response to Jesus, our acceptance or rejection of His call, determine if and how we understand these parables, because of that, Jesus can say in the second half of v. 25 "those who have nothing (meaning those who reject Jesus), even what they have will be taken away."

In other words, apart from living with Jesus and following His call, thinking about who God is and how God is at work in our lives and in this world is frustrating and in the end unsuccessful!

Apart from living with Jesus, these parables about how God is at work will not make sense.

But to those who walk through live with Jesus, to those who seek to follow Jesus, these parable can reveal how God is at work.

With that in mind, let's look at the parables that we read for today.

Before we articulate what the kingdom of God is, we need to hear what Jesus says about the kingdom of God.

Mark 4:26 "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, <sup>27</sup> and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. <sup>28</sup> The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. <sup>29</sup> But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

**Commented [3]:** Jesus keeps it real! not like glorious mountains, sunset, or other majestic imagery, but mundane every day things

When describing what the kingdom of God is like, Jesus does not talk about something majestic like mountains or something as beautiful as a sunset.

Instead, Jesus uses something mundane like the scattering of seed.

We need to remember that this is about how our individual response to Jesus fits within the larger picture of what God is doing.

Jesus describes here how we as followers of Jesus participate in how God is working towards the new creation.

Are we willing to wait patiently for the seed of the kingdom of God to grow or do we want to usher in the kingdom of God ourselves right now??

The kingdom of God is present, we are part of it, but it is not yet what it will be!

This passage invites us to be like the farmer who waits patiently for the seed to grow.

But being patient does not mean being passive.

God's work in this world and in our lives is not about stories that make the news.

We may want success and solutions right now, but God invites us to be faithful in the small and seemingly insignificant.

God invites us to be patient and faithful trusting that God is at work under the surface.

Being patient means being confident in the fact that God is at work but always remembering that the way things are right now is not the way things are supposed to be.

We are hopeful and patient because things are not yet the way they will be but God is on the move working with, in, and through us towards the new creation.

God is working towards a definite goal. God has an aim.

The passage that we read from the prophet Isaiah has been important to many followers of Jesus throughout history because it depicts with beautiful language what the goal is that God is working towards.

<sup>6</sup>The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.

<sup>7</sup>The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

<sup>8</sup>The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

<sup>9</sup>They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.

Throughout the history of the church, this passage has helped followers of Jesus reflect on what it means for them to participate in the coming kingdom of God when things around them were far from peaceful.

Following Jesus means letting this vision of what things will be like determine our action in the here and now.

Turning the other cheek has nothing to do with being passive precisely because we trust that God is at work and things are not yet the way they will be.

This vision undermines what our world is like right now.

When this vision is allowed to shape our action and attitude in the present moment, then we get to participate in God's work of moving everything towards the new creation.

Being patient like the farmer and trusting that God is at work, we participate in the kingdom of God like the farmer who waits for the seed to grow even though the farmer does not know how.

Both parables about the kingdom of God that we read for today highlight the contrast between the small beginnings and the wonder of growth leading towards the end result.

Like the mustard seed that has been sown, the kingdom of God is present in our day and time but it is not yet what it will be.

We live in this time between when there is not yet a shrub.

And living in this time in between is frustrating because things are not yet the way they will be and things are most certainly not the way they are supposed to be.

We all know this from our own lives! Life sometime sucks!

In this time in between, there is pain and suffering, tears and division, fights and fear, wars and hunger, sin and injustice.

All these things are still part of reality as we know it during this time in between

and all these things that are contrary to God's ways and desires for us have this strange ability to shade all of our thinking about past, present, and future.

Our passage for today presents to us the invitation to participate in God's ongoing work of moving all things towards the new creation.

Yes, life sucks, but the way things are is not the way things are supposed to be and the way things are is also not the way things will remain.

This passage from Isaiah is one of the most used passage in the life of the early Jesus movement because this vision of what things will be like provided followers of Jesus with a pattern and the motivation to follow Jesus in the present moment.

I am pretty sure that each one of you can think of things in your life that are not the way they are supposed to be.

By talking about the coming kingdom of God, Jesus both challenges us but also gives us hope.

Things are not the way they are supposed to be. That much is obvious.

However, there is hope because God is at work which means that things will not remain the way they are.

We don't know yet what it will be but the passage from Isaiah provides us with a vision of the goal that God is working towards.

But this vision is also a call to us to be a certain kind of people.

Yes, like the seed that has been sown, things are not yet what they will be like, but we are invited to be members of God's family and participate in God's ongoing work of moving everything towards the new creation.

In other words, as people who hope and wait for the day when things will be the way they are supposed to be, we live now in the present moment lives that already reflect and participate in what things will be like.

May the knowledge that God is actively working towards this goal of the new creation give you hope enabling you to participate in what God is doing in your life and in this world.