

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. (Mark 4:26-34 NIV2011)

Sow the Seed, Trust It Grows

A man wakes up and goes to work. He’s a farmer; so, he scatters the seed on the ground. After the long day, his work is done. There’s nothing more that he can or needs to do for that seed. He’s planted it; it’s time to let the seed do its part. He could worry and fret, but he knows that’s not going to help anything. It’s completely out of his control. The seed will grow when it will. His work is done. He goes to bed, rests his head, falls asleep, and gets up and goes to work again. I’m sure there could be a thousand of different things on his mind about this seed. He could fertilize the soil, make sure to water it and watch it. But he cannot force this seed to sprout and grow. At the same time, he has other work he needs to do. So, night and day, he wakes and goes to sleep going about his usual daily affairs. So, he sows the seed and trusts it will grow.

Then, what happens? It does all by itself. How exactly this happens, we don’t know. We can look at the science and see the different stages, but how it goes from lifeless seed to growing sprout, we don’t know. One day it’s a tiny sprout and, before you know it: first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel forms. In no time the plant is ready for the harvest and the farmer brings it in. Sow the seed, trust it will grow.

Jesus said, the kingdom of God is like this. Mark explains that when Jesus taught the crowds he spoke in parables. These are stories about earthly things to help illustrate and picture the working of God’s kingdom. When Jesus says, “God’s kingdom” or “the kingdom of God” he’s not talking about a physical location “over there” off in the distance. He’s teaching about God’s active rule and reign; his ongoing activity here. After teaching the parables Jesus would privately explain

everything to his disciples (v.34). As he did for his followers so many years ago, so we see what this means today.

The seed is the Word of God. A seed, when you look at it, looks so very insignificant. It's tiny. It's seemingly lifeless. When you just look at the Word, it seems so small, insignificant—noises in the air and ink on the page. This seed, the Word, is planted in the hearts and minds of people. We scatter that Word when we speak it and share it. Notice, when the farmer scatters the seed he isn't cautiously measuring out where exactly he puts the seed. He throws it out there; where it lands it lands. So we are to do with the Word. Scatter it. Throw it. Where it lands, it lands. Then, like the farmer, once the Word is sown, go home, put down your head, go to sleep, and start over tomorrow. Sow the seed, trust it will grow. It's as easy as that.

We tend to complicate things though. I know I can sit there, mull over the situation, overthink things, wanting things to be just right before saying something. Then, whilst I'm thinking, the sowing isn't being done. We get caught up deciding beforehand whether or not someone is going to be receptive to the Word...what if they say no? What if they don't listen? What if the timing isn't right? Soon we lose ourselves in the weeds of "what-ifs" and fail to scatter the seed and share the Word. Maybe part of that is because of those times when we have shared the Word and nothing seems to happen. Sometimes you get to see that "ah-ha" moment when the seed takes root and grows. More often we have to wait. And wait some more. And wait some more. We might wonder if it's doing anything at all! We want it to grow more quickly. It's so easy to get discouraged when we don't see the results. Should I have said something differently? Did I mess this person up completely because of how I spoke? Could I have been clearer? Would it have been better if someone else had sown the seed, spoken the Word? Would it have been more effective? And so instead of going to sleep, we keep ourselves awake: is it doing anything?

Jesus' simple response: It is. The seed sprouts and it grows though we don't know how. It is. So, sow the seed, go to sleep, get some rest, get up and do it again. While you are sleeping, God is working. Your work ends; God's work begins. He who speaks and creates this world from nothing is more than capable of using my lips to share his Word. Because it's not about the sower, the one speaking the Word. It's the seed, the Word itself that is powerful and effective. It is living and active (Hebrews 4:12). Though we cannot see how it works, it is. You and I cannot make it grow, God does. No one person is more receptive to this Word than the next. At the same time, there is no such thing as a heart that it is too stony, too

sandy, too malnourished and toxic for the seed to take root. The power is the Word. Sow the seed, trust it grows.

And grow it will. Look, for example, at the mustard seed; that's Jesus' next parable. Think of the tip of a pen—1-2 millimeters—that's how big this seed is. There may be smaller seeds out there, but Jesus isn't out here to discuss semantics. His point is you look at this tiny seed and, logically speaking, it doesn't look like it's going to grow into anything that great. Yet, when it is sown, planted into the ground, the seed grows into the largest of all garden plants with branches so large birds can nest in its shade. Some of these plants can grow as large as 10-12 feet tall; the height of a basketball hoop.

Jesus isn't here giving us a lesson in horticulture and gardening. Again, this is what the kingdom of God is like and his activity in our lives. What seems so small and can start out as something that seems so insignificant, this Word will grow with incredible, visible results.

Again, it shouldn't be as hard as we make it. But that's what we do when the results aren't what we think they should be. Frustrations pile up when it seems like the hard work I put in doesn't seem to be doing all that much. I expect things to change. I want things to improve! I'm sure you do too when you share God's Word. When you share Jesus' love, show someone their sin, when you encourage someone to be back in God's house, when you invite someone to come with you, you hope for, you pray for improvement, for change. Instead, we remember how we see when things haven't changed. We can quickly remember when things even got worse...As you look out in the world you might wonder, is this Word actually working? Is this seed taking root anywhere anymore? So many have heard and rejected it. We know too many who were steady at one time but fallen and slipped away. You can probably think of family members, close friends, loved ones, strangers who fit the bill; maybe that was you for a time. It's easy to become discouraged. It's easy to get burnt out and grow weary. It's easy to get stagnant. It's easy to think, "I know what is right, and if they aren't going to listen, it's on them." Put in your hour on Sunday morning and that's "good enough." After all, is anything going to help? We tell ourselves that we are just protecting ourselves from more disappointment. Leave it to someone else to talk about it; you still have to live with that family. You want to keep those friends. You have your own reputation to watch out for as well! So we don't sow the seed or share the Word. Why? If we really get down to it, it's not because "of them." They can't make you do anything. No, it's because we fail to trust God's promise that when we share his Word, sow the seed, it will grow.

But how can you be sure? Well, first off, God says so. Secondly, look what God's Word did in you. The soil of your heart was no more receptive or good than anyone else. It was just as rock-hard against God, full of death, and toxic with sinfulness as the next. But then the seed was planted. For some of you it was the Word scattered on your heart by a friend. Others it was a pastor who came to visit. Still others it was the word sown into your heart with the water at baptism. Working through that Word, the Spirit planted the seed, faith is created, and it took root. How it grows, we don't know. But it did. And we can see the results too. One fruit is you sitting right here today being in God's house, confessing your sin, singing God's praises—those are fruits of faith! It's also the love you show to your spouse. It's the respect you show mom and dad. It's the guiding hand of your children and grandchildren. It's the prayers you speak. It's the encouraging words you share with your friend.

There are such visible results not because you or I are such incredible people. It's because the power of the seed is the Word itself. The Word that was there from the beginning, is God. By this Word all things were made and it's the same Word that works in you. This Word is the seed that was conceived by the Holy Spirit and planted in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The seed of the woman promised in the Garden of Eden is born so small and seemingly insignificant. But this seed grows to crush Satan's head and free you from the power of the devil and slavery to sin. He's the seed who lives and dies to forgive our sinful lack-of-trust hearts. That seed is planted in the earth, into the grave of the tomb, where from that ground life sprouts—life for him and life for you. This Jesus is the Living Word; look at how he has grown—his name is above every name. We rest secure in the shade of his outstretched arms and forgiving love as he rules over all things for the good of his church, you his people. It's this same Word who is planted into our hearts and brings us into God's kingdom. And as this Word is shared and spoken, Jesus' reign spreads so more people find a home that is safe and secure in Christ.

So sow the seed. With reckless abandon, share the Word to all. We don't know how it grows, but it does according to God's timetable. And it does show results if we are careful to look for them. The results aren't necessarily in numbers or specific actions. It's not always flashy or newsworthy. To many it doesn't look all that extraordinary. But fruit is fruit and God commends you for it. And faith, without coercion, cannot help but show itself in action. So rest easy, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Sow the seed. Trust it will grow. It did in you. It will in them. Amen.