

HOW GOD WORKS IN OUR LIVES: 11TH SUNDAY B

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When we want to explain something, particularly something so personal as falling in love, we may struggle to find the right words. Often we have to say that it's like something else. When Jesus speaks about the kingdom - the reign and rule of God - and how God works among us to make his kingdom happen, he never says just what the kingdom is. Rather he speaks about what it's like. So Jesus uses parables, comparisons, to teach his message that God is on the job, and that God's kingdom is really and truly happening. All appearances to the contrary notwithstanding!

So in his first parable today Jesus compares the coming of the kingdom of God to what happens when a farmer sows seed in the ground. Once it's sown, the farmer waits for harvest time. Even though nothing seems to be happening, the miracle of growth is taking place. The farmer cannot get a better crop by staying awake at night and worrying. The seed grows of its own accord and cannot be rushed. Neither can God's work of making a better world, God's kind of world, the world of God's kingdom, be hurried. After all, it's God's kingdom, not ours.

A customer once went to a Farmer's Market. Passing a stand heaped with luscious tomatoes, he asked the farmer behind it, *'Did you grow these tomatoes?'* *'No,'* he replied, *'I planted the seed.'* Afterwards the farmer said to God, *'Thank you, Lord, for the fine harvest!'* Then he sensed God saying to him, *'And thank you too for preparing the soil and sowing the seed! We did a good job together, didn't we?'*

In his second parable Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a tiny mustard seed that bit by bit grows into the largest shrub, big enough for the birds of the air to shelter in its shade. Once again in the work of God *'small is beautiful!'*

Both parables, then, are about the growth of seed. Jesus told them, and then writers like Mark retold them to encourage the first followers of Jesus who were worried about the slow growth of God's kingdom. Their point in telling them was the need for their hearers and readers to be patient, to trust, and not to expect instant results.

That message is timely and encouraging to us too, particularly to those of us who are always rushing around, like that woman in the poster who has to admit, *'The hurrieder I go, the behinder I get!'* We live in an age of instant soup, instant tea and instant photos, just about instant everything, in fact. We can make many things happen simply by pressing a button or turning a switch. We forget that certain things cannot be rushed. For example! To mature fully as a human being takes a lifetime. To build a good relationship with another usually takes lots of time. To get to know and understand one's children or one's parents never happens instantly or automatically. To overcome one's sins and weaknesses may even take

a whole life-time, even with God's '*amazing grace*' at work in us. When so much of life today is getting instant results we must remember that some things actually require considerable time and practice, e.g. the skills to play the piano, to sing opera, to play league football, or to successfully raise a family.

Those two lovely parables of the seed growing of itself show us that there is an almighty power working for us. Our part is to do a good job preparing the soil and sowing the seed. Then we must let God take over, as God usually does. Any farmer will tell you that if we do the right thing, if we do the very best that we can do, the harvest will surely come. God and God's work in us and among us will ultimately triumph.

But can we be patient? Can we keep waiting? Can we keep on trusting that it will all work out in the end? In short, can we just let go and let God – let go of our anxiety and let God be God? Can we? Will we?

Today's first parable reminds us of what we do when we share our faith. We scatter seed. Once we do that, the seed is out of our hands. Will people be affected by what we share? Will they be touched by the Word or not? It's not, then, about our control. It's about God's active presence in the Word we share. That's why the first parable should be particularly consoling and encouraging to everyone sharing their faith with others.

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