

June 13, 2021
11th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 4:26-34

Jesus said to the crowds, "This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come."

He said, "To what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it? It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade."

With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it. Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.

Background:

The gospel text for today is composed of two short parables that draw on the common experience of people of the day. Both parables reflect the experience of planting seeds, and how they develop into mature plants. While the parables may reflect a primitive understanding of how seeds develop into mature plants, they point to the sacred mystery that is unfolding in creation every day, even though this mystery is barely perceptible to most as it is unfolding.

As Jesus tells these two parables, no mention is made of the work of weeding, fertilizing or watering. The fact that the plants grow and develop to maturity adds to the sense of mystery, and that God is present, unfolding whatever it is that God desires in the seeds that God has created, in the earth that God has created, with the rain and the sun that God has created. The plants, like the reign of God, are unfolding as God has established.

Agriculture was one of the places where people of Jesus' time could be surprised by abundance. For the most part, people believed that everything that existed had already been distributed by God, and there was no more where that had come from. If a person suddenly had more of something, it was generally assumed that they had gotten it by some improper means.

Thus, the woman who finds her lost coin throws a lavish party to celebrate finding the coin. She makes her discovery public, warding off suspicion and speculations about how she got the coin. It is also much less likely that neighbors will be critical if they have enjoyed a portion of its fruit.

But farming was one of the places where the surprise of abundance might be experienced without the presumption of foul play. At the same time there was also an understanding that if one did gain more than they needed for their survival, the abundance was to be shared with those in need. This sheds light on the familiar parable of the farmer who thought he would build larger storage bins for an abundant harvest and live off his surplus for years in the future. He died enjoying neither the abundant harvest, nor the good reputation he could have had by sharing the abundance with those in need. Instead, when he died, a different reputation continued on after his death.

Reflection Questions:

1. What are some areas in your personal life where you have experienced growth, diminishment, or changes that were imperceptible in your daily life?
2. What are some of your favorite images or passages from scripture of the reign of God?

3. What qualities do you think people who have devoted their lives to things like tending the earth, gardening, and earth conservation might share? How might those qualities affect their relationships to God and to others?
4. When I think about watching a seed grow into a large bush or a tree, I am...
5. Can you take some time now to talk with God about your hopes for the reign of God, the way and pace at which it seems to be unfolding, and your own willingness to let God work in God's time?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscclom.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for June 13th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel from Mark is in two parts. The second part is the parable where Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, that grows and branches out into a shrub large enough to shelter birds. In the first part, Jesus says the kingdom is "as if a man were to scatter seed, and the seed sprouts and grows on its own, and the man knows not how. When the grain is ripe, the harvest has come." The other readings also refer to planting, growing, putting forth branches and fruit, and the harvest. In the first reading from Ezekiel, thus says the Lord: "I will take a cedar shoot and plant it on a lofty mountain; it shall put forth branches and bear fruit. All shall know that I bring low the high tree and lift high the lowly tree." Psalm 92 proclaims, "The just one shall flourish like a cedar. They that are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish; they shall bear fruit even in old age." In the second reading from 2 Corinthians, Paul writes, "While we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith. We must all appear before Christ; each will receive recompense according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!

Excerpts from the readings for June 13, 2021, the Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thus says the Lord God: I, too, will take from the crest of the cedar,
from its topmost branches tear off a tender shoot, and plant it on a high and lofty mountain;
on the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it.
It shall put forth branches and bear fruit, and become a majestic cedar.
Birds of every kind shall dwell beneath it, every winged thing in the shade of its boughs.
And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the Lord, bring low the high tree,
lift high the lowly tree, wither up the green tree, and make the withered tree bloom.
As I, the Lord, have spoken, so will I do.

Lord, it is good to give thanks to you, to sing praise to your name, Most High,
To proclaim your kindness at dawn and your faithfulness throughout the night.
The just one shall flourish like the palm tree, like a cedar of Lebanon shall he grow.
They that are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.
They shall bear fruit even in old age; vigorous and sturdy shall they be,
Declaring how just is the Lord, my rock, in whom there is no wrong.

Brothers and sisters: We are always courageous, although we know that while we are at home in
the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.
Yet we are courageous, and we would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord.
Therefore, we aspire to please him, whether we are at home or away.
For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense,
according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil.

Jesus said to the crowds: "This is how it is with the kingdom of God;
it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day
and through it all the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how.
Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.
And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come."
He said, "To what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it?
It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth.
But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches,
so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade."
With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it.
Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.

Excerpts from Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 92:2-3, 13-16; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10; and Mark 4:26-34