

Proper 6 B
Mark 4:26-34
June 13, 2021

Our Dreams are the Seeds
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[Jesus] also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'

He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

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Do we have any gardeners in the house? Don't be shy; raise those hands proudly. Thank you. At some point, please, please tell me how it's done!

I like to fancy myself a gardener. Recently, we planted tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers all grown from seed by my sister. She *is* a gardener with a truly green thumb. I've been faithfully watering those saplings every

day throughout this present warm spell and the tomatoes have doubled in size, the peppers have doubled in size, and the cucumbers are blooming. I should actually rephrase that last statement: the tomatoes *had* doubled in size, the peppers *had* doubled in size, and the cucumbers *were* blooming.

Tuesday of last week, my partner Charles texted me a wonderful photo of a groundhog that he'd taken from the study window that looks out on our backyard. Then, he texted another. And another. Three groundhogs and not just three photos. The caption read something like, "Am I supposed to let them eat your tomatoes?" Charles does not fancy himself a gardener. He does, however, dabble in amateur photography and if you look at those photos carefully, you can see that the tomatoes and peppers *had* actually doubled in size and that the cucumbers really *were* blooming.

On Thursday evening, there were four of them and they'd moved on from the garden to the pots on the patio and were happily mowing down the herbs.

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Whether or not you fancy yourself a gardener, there's something wonderfully organic about Jesus' parables in this morning's text from Mark. To paraphrase, he said that the kingdom of God is like a planter who sowed seed and then, as if by magic, the earth brought forth the sprout, the plant, and then the fruit. I feel that it's necessary to point out at this time that Jesus was not a farmer. He was a carpenter. Any farmer, or gardener for that matter, would tell you that it takes a lot of work to get from seed to fruit! He also said that the kingdom of God is like a tiny seed that grows into a huge shrub, bringing shelter and shade. Those are lovely images, aren't they? They're relatable and down to earth and just sort of *truthy*. But what in the world do they mean?

To his first century audience, the first parable may have been a bit off-putting, as Jesus clearly had no idea the toil of farmers. The second image,

though, of the mustard seed, may have seemed more evident, but it was still not necessarily good news to his hearers. Mustard was a weed. Jesus' metaphor of the mustard seed was like comparing the kingdom of God to dandelion fluff that blows hither and yon infecting all the lushest of green lawns with plague of yellow flowers. It's stealthy. It starts small. It blows where it will. And it sprouts, blooms, and spreads like a weed. It's not exactly good news for gardeners, but I think it's that image of tiny things like seeds, secretly germinating in the quiet earth, pushing through the crust of topsoil, sprouting, leafing, growing, and eventually fruiting or providing shelter and shade that Jesus is drawing attention to. In fact, I'd be willing to bet that Jesus knew exactly how ridiculous both of these little metaphors sounded to his audience. But he clearly wanted to communicate that something about those seeds is like the kingdom of God.

Before I share what I think that "something" is, I'd like to say a couple of things about Jesus' notion of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God or the realm of heaven was more than just one among any number of favorite talking points for Jesus. I'd even go so far as to say that it is actually his *only* talking point—that everything else he said or did in some way pointed back to the kingdom of God. In fact, his preaching proclaimed it, his teaching explained it, and his healings and miracles illustrated it. For Jesus, this realm or kingdom wasn't a place we go after we die, it was his dream of life on earth, here and now and for everyone.

Singer Debby Boone once said that, "Dreams are the seeds of change. Nothing ever grows without a seed, and nothing ever changes without a dream." For Jesus, the kingdom of God was exactly that dream and he spent his life sowing seeds that he hoped would one day bring it about. Further, he used the image of the seed, an innocent, insignificant, innocuous seed, as a metaphor for the subtle, subversive, spreading realm of heaven on earth. And with that powerful little metaphor, Jesus invited his audiences to dream with him and to plant shrewd seeds of change in their world.

If I'm honest, as meaningful as it is to many people, I almost think that the cross is the wrong symbol for the Jesus movement. It should really be a seed—a mustard weed seed or dandelion fluff. The cross is a reminder of just how far Jesus was willing to go for his dream, but the seed is a reminder of the dream itself—the subtle, subversive, spreading dream of heaven's realm right here, right now, for all.

And so I leave you to ponder:

Today is the day to dream:
dreams for yourself, for this church, for our world.
Our dreams are the seeds of change.
Nothing ever grows without a seed,
and nothing ever changes without a dream.
Dream your dream.
Plant your seed.
And may the kingdom of God,
the realm of heaven,
germinate, sprout, leaf, grow, and bear fruit and shade
right here, right now, for all.

Amen.