



2 Corinthians 5:6-17; Mark 4:26-34
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (June 16, 2024)

Today's gospel selection is part of a whole series of Jesus' parables about farmers and seeds found in Mark's gospel, ch. 4. In these parables, Jesus displays a strong **sense of humor** by pointing out actions that don't make sense when taken at face-value but require **trust and imagination** to comprehend. Mark injects his own **sarcasm** when he declares that Jesus had to explain everything to the disciples.

There are two parables in today's gospel. In the first one, Jesus describes the reality of the kingdom of God with an easy-to-understand **plant growing process**: first there is the seed's silent and unprovoked growth.

The hand of the farmer rests after having scattered the seed. The seed in the ground will do the rest. There is **no rush, no strife, only mystery and beauty**. This awareness calls for **awe**, for **gladness**, for **joy** and **thanksgiving**. There is an energy in life, a mystery that the farmer cannot control but acknowledge and respect. Surely, the farmer is called to prepare the soil, water it, and pull out the weeds, but it requires **humility** and **hope**. One does one's part, trusting that God will provide the rest.

The parable of the mustard seed is either an example of Jesus' outrageous sense of humor or he doesn't know much about farming. **Mustard sabotages other crops**. Considered an invasive weed, it chokes out anything in its ever-expanding

territory. By elevating this outrageous plant to exemplary behavior, Jesus offers this confounding description of the reigning of God to slow down one's **judgmental tendencies** and preconceived ideas and stimulate **curiosity**. Even nuisance can be useful and productive!

Jesus' mustard seed image complements the notion of the hidden seed's tenacious tendency toward life. Not only does God's reigning grow from a power inherent in creation, but it can take over like an irrepressible weed. This is the force of God's cosmic vision and final reconciling purpose pulling us from the future. Because it is **creation's destiny**, we can do no more than **collaborate or temporarily hinder it**. The paschal mystery teaches that it cannot be stopped. We better get on board with it.

The reigning of God initiated by the Messiah is not as politically expedient and military clamorous as expected. It was quiet, hidden, almost ordinary, and required *only* trust and faithfulness.

Yet, as a growing seed, a faithful disciple will be able to notice personal and communal growth, and as a mustard seed, it expands its influence and is more powerful than an established system.

As people of the resurrection, Jesus' images reassure us that **God's reigning is here and there and everywhere**, and that it will be the future of everything. When we believe that, we can relax because **it's not all in our hands**. The reigning (an active verb rather than reign, a static noun) of God is among us. We're on the way to it and we can make it our way of life.

Hidden things, things that require a different way of seeing, inspire our **attention**, our sense of **wonder** and **admiration**, **reverence** and **gratitude**.

We cannot comprehend the reigning of God, God's activity, fully on this side of life. It's somewhat hidden, somewhat mysterious and yet present, alive, happening and making new things happen. **Trust** allows us to have a glimpse of it, to feel the attraction, the pull, the longing, to perceive the depth of reality and see anew beyond the surface and human perceptions.

Full understanding will happen one day when we will see God face to face. It would be nice to be there already. With Paul, "we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:8) I have often heard people wondering why they are still alive and living in a tired and hurting body.

Comedian **Milton Berle** quips: "You're aging when your actions creak louder than your words."

At times, emotional distress and intense grief move us to ask the Lord to take our pain away or even take us altogether? But it's not up to us to decide "when" this will happen. For now, we simply trust: "we walk by faith, not by sight." (v. 7)

For now, we know we live in a body with limitations which sometimes may be truly severe. As we wait for what is corruptible to enjoy immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53), we do things moved by God's Spirit, "we make it our aim to please him." (2 Corinthians 5:9)

Yes, in fact "the love of Christ compels us" (v. 14). Any time we listen to the Spirit within and act according to the commands of Christ, God reigns in us and the seed of God has a chance to grow into a shelter-offering, life-giving shrub where there is rest and protection and community. In him who has died for all, all have died and live resurrected lives (v. 15).

But the opposite is also true: whenever we act out of anger, hate, revenge, jealousy, and spite; whenever we seek self-affirmation and control, whenever we pursue dominance or gain, whenever, in other words, we seek our life, we lose it and hurt ourselves, others, and the rest of creation in the process. We could say we walk around as dead people capable of death-dealing only.

Therefore, whenever we look at each other, we look with new eyes, we see the deeper reality of people living as resurrected disciples of Christ, imbued of new light, and seeking the well-being of God's creation.

We see all people as children of God even as they may still be bound, still held captive to fear, still acting out of selfishness, incapable of empathy, numb to the pain of others, hiding from the truth and attempting to manipulate it when it becomes uncomfortable.

All, even though sitting in darkness and walking in the shadow of death, are **children of God in need of liberation**, of new life, of growth in the Lord, of sheltering from the heat of "sin," protected from harm, fed and embraced.

You and I are ambassadors for Christ, proclaimers of this new reality, of the new creation in Christ.

Let the nations know that they are loved.

Open your heart, shelter the hurting, the lonely, the tired. Amen.