

Scripture:
Mark 4:26-34

“What shall we say the kingdom of God is like?”

What shall we say the kingdom of God is like?

Depending on the source you consult there are about 100 references to the kingdom of God in the Bible.

And often in the New Testament where most of these references occur ---- we often have something along the lines of ---- “The kingdom of God is like...”

Not --- “the kingdom of God IS ...” ----- but ----- “the kingdom of God IS LIKE...”

Before we even get to what the kingdom of God is like --- it might first be helpful to consider what we mean by the Kingdom of God.

One person described the kingdom of God as ---- “God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule.”

Another said the kingdom of God is ---- “the day when God’s will will be done as perfectly on earth as it is in heaven.”

Still others make distinctions between the political kingdom of God ----- the spiritual kingdom of God ---- the future kingdom ---- and the realized or present kingdom of God ---- and so on.

And the best answer --- is --- ----- it’s all of these and so much more.

In other words ----- the best answer is ----- the Kingdom of God is a mystery --- something we can’t fully wrap our heads around.

It’s greater and wider ----- more powerful and beautiful ---- deeper and richer --- than we’re capable of comprehending.

It is God’s to know and understand and define --- and ours to simply live into and follow.

And so perhaps the very first thing to know about the kingdom of God is that any and every description is but partial.

Even Jesus in verse 30 today ----- speaking about the kingdom says ----- “what shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?”

Jesus Himself ----- asking ---- “what shall we say it is like?” ----- takes over 60 stabs at describing it in the gospels ----- and each one is only ever partial.

But before we explore the 2 descriptions Jesus employs in our reading today ----- a growing seed and a mustard seed ---- I first want to stress that there is no one way of explaining a parable that captures all there is to say about it -- --- including what you are about to hear.

Some explorations are more faithful than others --- and some less faithful for sure --- but all are only ever partial.

It did after all take Jesus over 60 descriptions --- and perhaps even more ---- to begin to paint a picture of the kingdom of God.

So today in Mark’s gospel we have 2 attempts to paint a picture of how the kingdom of God works --- a planted seed --- and then a very particular kind of seed ---- a mustard seed.

So first of all why a seed ---- why does Jesus refer to the kingdom of God as like a planted seed?

He could have chosen a root --- or a branch ---- or a river --- or a lake ---- or a fish --- or a bear ---- or whatever --- but He chooses a seed ---- why a seed?

Some thoughts.

The farmer doesn’t ---- and can’t make a seed grow ---- yes he or she can work at enabling the seed germinate --- and take root ---- and grow by providing the best possible environment.

The best soil --- adequate water and light ---- pest free environment and so on --- but the farmer cannot ever force the seed into growth or germination --
- ultimately that's out of his or her hands.

Many seeds can be planted in the exact same soil --- under the exact same conditions ---- and yet only some of them will grow.

In a sense the seed grows or not ----- as a secret life of its own.

“A man scatters the seed on the ground. Night and day ---- whether he sleeps or gets up the seed sprouts and grows though he does not know how. All by itself it produces grain...”

The words of Jesus Himself ---- Mark's gospel today.

“A man scatters the seed on the ground. Night and day ---- whether he sleeps or gets up the seed sprouts and grows though he does not know how. All by itself it produces grain...”

So what does this tell us about the kingdom of God.

“All by itself it produces grain...” --- if nothing else it tells us that we do **not** create the kingdom of God --- and that God does ---- “All by itself it produces grain...”

At the same time ---- it doesn't mean that we do nothing and sit back and simply watch God establish His kingdom.

The farmer first had to prepare the soil --- scatter the seeds ---- and water them ---- there was some effort on his part ---- but in the end the results are not directly related to his effort.

In the end the results --- the harvest has far more to do with God than him.

Behind all things is God and the power and will of God.

The farmer first needs the seed --- he can't make a seed --- no one ever made a seed ----- yes now we modify them and graft some with others --- but we still need actual seeds in the first place ---- and that is God's doing.

The kingdom of God ----- is first and foremost of God's doing.

We may frustrate and hinder God's kingdom ---- we can even from time to time ---- play a part where His kingdom is given opportunity to be realized -- ---- but ultimately the kingdom of God is God's initiative.

So first ----- the kingdom of God among other things is like planted seed --- -- things happen --- it comes to fruition first and foremost --- primarily --- because of God's doing and not any human effort or accomplishment.

But then Jesus takes it a step further saying it is not just like any seed --- but the kingdom of God is like the mustard seed.

The kingdom of God is like a growing seed ---- and further the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed ----- according to Jesus.

So the question is ----- what is it about a mustard seed that makes it the prime seed choice for Christ in describing the kingdom of God?

What is it about the mustard seed that makes it Jesus' seed of choice with regards to kingdom of God talk?

I'm no expert on mustard seeds but I did find out the following.

1. Once a mustard seed takes root --- it is extremely difficult to get rid of it -- ---- it is strong and powerful --- and very hard to uproot once it sprouts.
2. The mustard seed has fierce and powerful effects ---- it's pungent ---- and is extremely beneficial for health ----- it represses bile and regulates all sorts of inflammations.
3. The mustard seed resists infection and adversity and is potently strong and resilient.

And 4. -----perhaps most interesting of all ---- when the fruit of the seed --- its leaf --- is bruised or crushed it shows forth its power at a rate virtually unparalleled in all of nature.

When the fruit of the seed --- its leaf --- is bruised or crushed it shows forth its power at a rate virtually unparalleled in all of nature.

As long as a mustard leaf remains intact its properties lie dormant --- but when it is crushed they become exceedingly evident --- in other words its power is concealed until it is crushed ---- or tested.

Now all of a sudden there's a whole lot of useful and helpful stuff here that relates to God's kingdom and will.

Beyond just things like ----- it starts small and grows big --- it happens mysteriously ---- and so on --- there's more.

God's kingdom is mysterious in that it grows by its own accord ----- true.

God's kingdom can start small ---- very small ----- and grow big --- true.

God's kingdom ----- once it lays roots ---- is extremely hard to get rid of it --
- resilient --- resisting infection and adversity ---- it's not fragile or fickle ---
true.

And --- perhaps most important --- and powerful of all.

The kingdom of God ----- like the leaf of a mustard plant ----- is only fully appreciated ---- and most clearly noticeable -----once it has been cracked and bruised.

The true power of Christ --- the ultimate saving power of Christ ----- is most powerfully manifested when it is tested ---- beaten down a bit and bruised.

You might even say ---- the power and potency of the mustard leaf is actually concealed ---- until it is banged up and bruised.

The power and potency --- the saving nature of Christ ---- is also sometimes concealed ----- hidden ---- until it too is tested and tried --- bruised and knocked around a bit.

The kingdom of God is not only resilient ---- and strong of root ----- but it comes most alive when it is cracked open and broken apart.

In adversity its truest character is revealed.

This is great encouragement for us as people of faith.

Not only does the kingdom of God grow silently --- almost unnoticeably --- like grass growing --- or paint drying --- imperceivable if you stare at it but happening right before your eyes nonetheless.

Not only does it grow silently ----- but its strength and character are most noticeable when it is bruised and broken.

Jesus doesn't choose the mustard seed flippantly in describing the kingdom of God ----- it's deliberate.

This one description of the kingdom --- may not capture everything ---- but it does offer a powerful glimpse into the kingdom.

Many people try to describe what the kingdom of God is like --- many who don't believe in Jesus even enter into kingdom talk --- often simply dismissing it ----- as hog wash and useless --- not true --- for the weak minded --- and so on.

Indeed at the end of every day there is a "Congressional Record" published in the United States that details every spoken word on the floor of the house of Senate ---- and its many many inches thick.

I imagine it's the same for our House of Commons ----- our politicians are just as full of it as others right --- U.S. --- or otherwise.

Every week the Obama administration issues a flurry of new policy initiatives --- which ---- like the "Congressional Record" is thousands on thousands of pages ---- words after word after word.

The United Nations works daily to cobble together solutions and coalitions -- aimed at addressing all that ails this world.

If we were to bring together all the daily activity and indicators of the Toronto Stock exchange --- New York stock exchange ---- Nikkei Index ---- Chicago Board of Trade and so on ---- we'd have inches upon inches --- feet even of pages.

This kind of massive collection of works ---- day after day after day --- pile after pile after pile ----- attempts by human beings to tackle the many challenges this world faces --- doesn't work.

It never has ---- and never will.

But as Christians we have something else ----- something different to offer.

Our contribution to the great stockpile of words that attempts to address all that ails this world --- isn't just another case study --- or possible outcome.

It's our scriptures --- God's Word ----- and it's Jesus Christ ---- God's living Word.

And specifically for today the Word today is about the kingdom --- us living as God intends for us to live.

And it's far less about what we do --- and far more about what He does.

Whatever else the farmer may have --- great soil --- plenty of water --- faith that the sun will shine when he needs it to shine --- is all useless without first the seed ----- and the seed is something the farmer cannot create on his own ----- it comes from God.

The answers as to how to manage or combat or solve the challenges that ail this world -- cannot be created by us ---- it must come from God.

That doesn't mean we don't work at finding better solutions for things that ail our world --- hunger --- poverty --- the need for peace love and far greater acceptance of differences.

What it does mean is that we have to turn to the right sources to obtain them ---- the kingdom of God --- and not just another report or project of mere human words and conventions.

For in God's kingdom ---- we discover the potency and resiliency ----- the ability to survive and withstand where others wither ---- wilt --- and fall away.

In God's kingdom --- God's way ----- we have a regulatory --- stabilizing ---
 ---- healthy and beneficial presence --- a --- saving reconciling and
 redeeming presence ----- that promotes community ---- well being and then
 some.

And most powerful and "useful" of all ----- he kingdom of God --- the way
 God intends us to live together ----- reveals itself most clearly as it is tested
 and bruised and broken --- just as Christ's power and influence and saving
 presence was most clearly revealed as He was tested and bruised and broken
 ----- crucified.

Hundreds of inches of reports --- hundreds of thousands of pages on pages
 on pages ----- will never succeed at addressing all the threats and maladies
 of this world.

Sin and evil ----- personally and globally ----- can only be reshaped by the
 kingdom of God taking root in people's lives --- which first takes place by
 Christ taking root in people's lives.

So ----- "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like?"

How about ----- a seed growing.

Quietly ----- mysteriously ----- almost imperceptibly.

And not just any seed but a mustard seed.

Starting tiny --- growing huge.

Very difficult to uproot and eradicate --- impossible even.

Resilient.

Potently strong and pungent.

Fiercely works the kingdom of God.

Most powerfully revealed as it is bruised and crushed.

That's what we shall say the kingdom of God is like ---- at least for today.

And may this give us great hope.

God is near ---- His kingdom is not of this world --- and it never fades away.

Indeed the more it pushed around --- and knocked about ---- the more powerfully its aromas fill the air ---- and change the climate of all around it.

Forever silently working away.

Beginning small --- ending up huge and beautiful.

Potent.

Strong.

Resilient.

Fierce.

Most powerfully revealed as it is bruised.

That's the kingdom of God according to Jesus today --- Mark 4 26-34.

Amen.