

# The Growing Season

Mark 4:26-34

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AUDIO: <http://fbcjc.buzzsprout.com/7678/280796-the-growing-season>

I love this time of year--everything is so green, lush and growing. Flowers, trees, crops. Creation is full of life and full of promise. Have you ever stopped to think how many scriptures use agriculture/horticulture imagery? Think about it. "Those who go out sowing tears shall come rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them..." (Psalm 126); "the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few..." (Matt. 9); "The fruit of the Spirit is..." (Gal. 5).

And then there is our text, Mark 4:26ff. There is a miracle and beauty to the growing season. How does corn go from a dying seed to this [slide of small corn stalks], to this [slide of corn tassled out]; to this [slide of ears of corn]? All that energy and life, packed inside that tiny seed! All of which goes to prove: it takes imagination to farm. Just like it takes imagination to do Kingdom work or church work or to follow Jesus (remember that our visioning process this year has been named Imagine If).

Stop and think. Every living plant starts with death. The grain dies in the earth, germination. We come to the end of ourselves. We die. This is a good reminder that to become a follower of Jesus, you don't just tweak a few bad habits or adjust some attitudes or change your Sunday hobby. You die. Repentance! And then you're born and you grow. Do you know that research has shown that the single largest factor causing people to attend church for the first time is a personal crisis? Death, then resurrection.

I love this parable because it deals with the question, Who's in charge around here? [Anthony Robinson, *Pastoral Work*, eds. Byassee and Owens p. 28]. Certainly not the farmer, and certainly not us (we have to watch and wait). There is this deeply mysterious auto-power ("all by itself", v. 28...the Greek word is *auto-mey-tey*), followed by a process requiring patience, imagination and a trust in God's sovereignty ("first the stalk..."). We like to organize church as if we're calling the shots, but we're not. We like to organize life as if we're in charge, but we're not. This morning, are you able to let God be God? On God's timetable, in God's way? Are you willing to let God lead and grow the crop God's way?

Think how this story (and the next story about a mustard seed, vv. 30-32). must have encouraged the early church, so small and powerless against the mighty Roman Empire. Within these seeds, a mighty power unleashing the forces of a sovereign God! A theologian once gave the closing address at a futuring conference, back when Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* was all the rage. Papers had been read by sociologists, culture critics and other experts trying to predict what the future would look like. As he closed, the theologian said, "I have no idea what the future holds. I know only that it will be held in the hands of God." Years later, he came across all

those papers and speeches. After rereading them, he said, "You know, I was the only one who was right!" [*Christian Century*, June 27, 2012].

A friend of mine named Chip found Christ and attempted to share him with a friend. The friend said, "I don't want that \_\_\_\_\_." Later, Chip and the friend were traveling together for business. Chip said, "I don't want to offend you, but I promised others that I would be praying at 11:00 today, so I'm going to go in another room and pray." Later, Chip's friend came to Christ. But it was 12 years after he had said, "I don't want that \_\_\_\_\_."

Let me introduce you to a Baptist hero. Glen Stassen passed away a year ago, and we lost a brilliant ethicist and follower of Jesus. I got to meet him and hear him speak a few years ago. He is credited with playing a role in advancing nuclear disarmament talks toward the end of the Cold War. He also played a role in protesting the Berlin Wall and while politicians and diplomats get the credit for the fall of communism, Stassen told us the secret story--how churches in Germany were the key to history's shift and the fall of communism. He told us that during the Cold War, the one public place where people could gather was in churches. And so they met and prayed. And protested. Do you know what Glen Stassen's life motto was? "All we have are mustard seeds."

During WWII, a church in London was preparing for a harvest celebration. A sheaf of corn was placed in the sanctuary. The service was never held. The night before, a bomb dropped on the church, leveling it. Months later, in warmer weather, green shoots of corn began to grow where the church had stood. Bombs couldn't kill the seed. The seed contained...power, mystery, imagination, potential, a sovereign God's promise and life!