

# Bible study on Mark 4.26-34

## Begin with an opening prayer

Creator God,

we bring to you all that is growing within us:

**for you to bless and nurture.**

We bring our prayers for the spread of your kingdom:

**for you to bless and nurture.**

We bring the initiatives for justice multiplying among nations:

**for you to bless and nurture.**

We bring the hopes and dreams, tiny and big,

of all your children around the world:

**for you to bless and nurture.**

In Jesus' name.

**Amen.**

## Read the passage

### Explore and respond to the text

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

#### Bible notes

Jesus uses images of plants and trees in his parables. This is surely much more significant than simply borrowing from the scenery around him. He could have talked about carpentry and building, for instance, and yet he talks about plants and growth.

The abiding image for the kingdom of God is growth, not construction. Growth is silent. It continues day and night. There is still a mystery and wonder around how a seed becomes a mature plant, even now that we understand DNA and photosynthesis. It is still astonishing that new life germinates, and we are still reliant on this natural process for our staple foods. All our skill at farming and food production is predicated on this natural force.

These two parables suggest the kingdom of God also has this tremendous growing energy, similar to the emerging life of a seed. We seem to have little to contribute to the process, beyond initially sowing the seed and perhaps taking care of the plant. The earth and the seed together produce the mature plants, and this happens whether the grower is awake or asleep. The mustard seed grows to become a huge shrub, with

room for the birds in its shade (reminiscent of the tree in Ezekiel 17.23). This is what the kingdom of God is like, growing mysteriously and wonderfully.

This is not the only image of the kingdom of God in the parables of Jesus: there are also family relationships, work colleagues, things that happen at wedding feasts and things that are lost, among others. But this cluster of parables reminds us of the mysterious energy secretly at work in the world – not only the Church – to produce the growth of God’s kingdom.

## Reflection

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

How do we view Christians that we disagree with? How can we affirm that ‘everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new’ if they hold values that we deeply disagree with? This is a big challenge and may strain the bonds of fellowship. Interestingly, Paul makes this assertion in the middle of a series of letters full of frank disagreements. So, he is not recommending ‘saccharin sweetness’ but more honest relationships. Maybe part of the answer lies in Jesus’ parables: if we catch a vision of the kingdom persistently growing, we can have the courage to play our part faithfully, knowing that it is not all about us

## Questions for reflection

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.*



- What do you like or dislike about this ‘environment’?
- What helps you to flourish?
- Where do you see God’s kingdom-values at work in your community?

## **Prayer**

### **A prayer of adoration**

God of mystery,  
Sower, Saviour, Spirit,  
we worship you;  
and we ask you to give us:  
eyes to notice where the seeds of your kingdom are growing,  
courage to show them to others,  
faith enough to help nurture them,  
and a heart that delights in their harvest  
**Amen.**

### **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Go in peace to love and serve God's world.  
It is beautiful and you are part of it.  
It is our sacred commission to help God love it.  
**Amen.**