

# The Growing Seed

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

## Prayer of Illumination

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that as the scriptures are read and your Word is proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us this day. Amen.



## Background

Our morning's parable is only found in Mark's gospel. It's short and sweet and packed with power. It's a parable about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is another name for God's reign and rule. The kingdom of God is God's heavenly desire or dream for us. It's God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. And so King Jesus shows us the character and nature of what God's reign or rule looks like—and it's kind of like a seed. The secret of life and growth is found, not in us, but in the kingdom, in the work of Christ.

*Let's hear now the word of the Lord from ...*

**Scripture: Mark 4:26-29 (NRSV)**

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."

***The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.***

**SERMON – The Growing Seed**

Seeds are miraculous, crammed with possibility.

George Bernard Shaw talked about the "fierce energy" of the seed. Think about it. If you bury an acorn in the ground, what eventually comes out? A massive oak tree. If you bury, say, a sheep in the ground, what do you get? Only decay. Oak trees, sequoias, mustard, wheat, and 353,000 other plants all come from a small seed.

Seeds surround us, from our morning coffee, toast and jam to our clothes made of cotton. Seeds provide so many things: food, fuels, intoxicants, poisons, oils, dyes, fibers, and spices. If we didn't have seeds, we wouldn't have bread, rice, beans, corn, or nuts. Seeds are the foundation of diets, economies, and lifestyles around the world.

Thor Hanson shares in his fascinating book "The Triumph of Seeds" how seeds have shaped our world and human history.

- Seeds nourish. They come pre-packaged with the baby plant's first meal—everything it needs to grow the root, shoot, and leaf.
- Seeds unite and propagate. Plants come together to make portable, ready to sprout offspring.
- Seeds spread around the world by countless ways, tossed onto shore by waves, spun for miles in the air by wind, or packaged in a fruit.
- Seeds are resilient. In fact, seeds require stress to germinate—cold spells, fire, even passing through an animal's body enable a seed to grow.

All of these stressors unlock, not block, the miracle of the seed. Stressors help the seed rather than hinder it. The seed must be buried in the earth and broken open in order to rise up out of the earth to bear fruit and bring life.

Some seeds can persevere, buried in soil for decades, remaining dormant until just the right amount of light, water, and nutrients come together. So the seed is patient. It can wait until the right time. In fact, a date seed discovered in the ruins of Masada, was able to germinate after lying dormant for nearly 2000 years!

Jesus was smart. There's a reason why he likened the kingdom of God to a seed in this similitude. He knew if a seed was present, a miracle was sure to follow. Seeds may start small, but they end big.

Jesus also likened our faith to a seed. "If you have the faith the size of what? ...a mustard seed, you can move mountains. Little seeds can move big mountains. The kingdom of God, the gift of faith, is small, yet miraculous and powerful. The seed gives us hope when we're facing our mountains.



The good news about seeds is that you don't have to understand them for them to work.

I've got a gift. I can make almost any plant die—grass, flowers, plants. "Grass withers and flowers fade" under my care. Even artificial plants seem to slightly wither under my care.

The parable of the growing seed reminds me how helpless I am on my own. I can't make the seed grow. But God can. The seed can. Not me.

God's kingdom has the power within it to grow. It isn't dependent upon me to grow. It's not the Kingdom of John, it's the Kingdom of God, God's kingdom. Of course, we can hinder or frustrate things. We can also contribute to better growth. But at the end of the day, it's God's will and God's power at work.

But we can't cling to our seed. We have to release it. To grow your seed, you can't grasp it. Let it go, and spread it generously—don't hold back. To increase it, you release it. We aren't supposed to bury our talents, but we are called to bury our seeds and let them do their work. It's an act of faith and trust. Of course we have our part to play. Faithfully, day and in and day out, we:

- Water our seeds.
- Irrigate the field.
- Till the soil.
- Protect against soil erosion.
- Fertilize it.
- Weed it.
- Remove rocks, thorns and thistles.
- And harvest at just the right time—not too early, not too late.

But Jesus' focus on this particular parable is not on these regular human activities, important as they are. In this analogy, he is emphasizing the inert power of the seed, not so much the sower's job.

The point of the parable is the miraculous potential of the abundant life Jesus offers. Divine power is baked into the kingdom of God. It's all there. We've just got to trust God.

So step back, get out of the way, and let the kingdom of God unleash its power. Don't fret or force it. Don't try to control it or manipulate it. Let it do its thing. Trust the process. Let it unfold. Jesus is saying to us, "Let go, I've got this. Trust in me, not in yourself." Trust the seed to meet your need. This is freeing. You're free to sleep—you have permission to do that. God is at work while you're resting. In fact, the only time humans grow is when they sleep. We don't have to be always smothering or meddling for things to happen.

Just as you are nourished in the dark by sleep, so too, the seed, tucked into the dark soil apart from us, is growing and will arise. Or as the psalmist says, "I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me." We can rest. And we can enjoy good honest work. But we entrust the outcome, the growth, the byproduct, to God. God, not us. We don't have to be in control. As Jesus says in the parable: "The earth produces of itself."

The Greek word for "of itself" is *automate*. It's where we get the word "automatic." I don't do it manually. God does it automatically. Of itself. Organically. It grows without human intervention. Take the load off your shoulders. Breathe deeply. God's got this.

I like this parable because it teaches a simple and powerful lesson: I can be patient. I can be encouraged—even if the seed hasn't sprouted yet. I can wait and trust the seed, give the seed time to grow. I'm free to slow down and watch the nuances of growth, just keep being faithful and watching.

Growth is often slow and imperceptible. If you see a child every day, you don't really see the growth. But if you haven't seen a child for a long time, it jumps out how much they've grown—because they have been growing all along! There is power in gradual growth—little by little. God isn't a microwave God or fast food God. God works slowly and steadily, imperceptibly. We have the hope of harvest.

Kingdom growth is quiet, steady, unceasing.

- A tree root can break concrete.
- A thirsty tree root finds water leaks in pipes and enters into the pipe.
- A seed eventually, with time, can break cement and iron.

In the same way, God is at work in our daily routines—we just have to pay attention, to know what to look for. It's ultimately God, not us. Let it unfold. Give it room to breathe and grow.

The Spirit slows us down to pay attention to that. The eyes of faith can pay attention for the stalk—then I can wait for the head to emerge—not rush it—and wait for the full grain. I can have hope, little by little, day by night. There may be nothing now, but that's okay. Give it time. It's not all on my shoulders to produce.

My faith is in God, with my seeds of faith.

This is a very important parable for us right now, Immanuel. Let's be honest and realistic about the state of our pasture right now. We're beginning our recovery and rebuilding from a receding pandemic that has been devastating. Some have left, some have gone on to glory. Our resources have gotten smaller.

On top of that, The terrain and atmosphere of our country is one of fragmentation. Just watch the news for a couple of minutes. The extremes are lobbing bombs at one another and those in the middle are caught in between. But the kingdom of God is like a seed. A seed starts small and unseen. It's powerful. It can weather heat and cold. In fact, hardship unlocks the seed's power. Breaking the seed is what opens up growth.

I have faith that God is working in us and through us, even in our brokenness. Broken ground is fertile ground for the seed to emerge. We can feel sorrow, regret, or concern. We can fail and make mistakes, but we're not defeated. We never despair. We're never hopeless or pessimistic. The power of the seed is at work. We don't know how God will do it, but we can trust that there will be a harvest. God's promises are being fulfilled in Christ.

You can't force the seed to grow on your timetable. The spiritual life is similar. God controls the mysterious process of growth. We're called to actively wait for the needed growth. Being patient isn't being passive. It's being present and attuned. Watching and waiting. Letting the process of the seed play itself out.

Our waiting isn't an empty or purposeless waiting. We trust that God's promises will come to fruition. If you act too soon, the fruit you pluck is hard and not tasty, like a green banana. If you wait too long after the harvest, the banana is brown. But at just the right time, the fruit is yellow and ready to be enjoyed. When we're impatient, we rush the present, we want to get it over with, to get through it, rather than really dwelling in the moment. We believe that God is at work even when we are not.

Catholic priest and author Henri Nouwen visited a friend who was very sick. His friend was 53 years old and had lived an active life. He was creative, tireless, always advocating for the poor. When he was 50 his friend was diagnosed with cancer and became increasingly sick and bedridden. He was facing an identity crisis. He shared these words,

"Henri, here I am lying in this bed, and I don't even know how to think about being sick."

He only knew himself through action. His identity came by doing things for people. Accomplishing things. Now that he couldn't help others or even help himself, he felt worthless.

"Henri, please help me to think about this situation in a new way. Help me to find worth and purpose when I can only be helped where I don't have agency."

Henri and his friend found hope in the life of Christ. Henri shared how Christ's life is divided into two parts. The first part of Christ's life is defined by action: healing, speaking, teaching, traveling. But the second part of Christ's life was very different. It moved from action to passion.

When Judas handed Jesus over to the authorities, Jesus no longer acts, only things are done to him. He's arrested, taken to various authorities, crowned with thorns, nailed to a cross. Things are done to him that he has no control over.

Jesus embraced God's call upon him, God's call not only to action, but God's call to passion. God was still working, even when Jesus couldn't. God is still working, even when we find ourselves in a standstill, even when we're on our sickbed or we're just stuck in life. Trust the power of the seed. God is in control, even when we're out of control.

Jesus said these words on the cross:

"It is finished."

Notice he didn't say, "I finished it."

He said, "It is finished."

God did it.

And on the third day,  
God raised up Jesus from his grave.  
God will raise us up from our grave.  
God will raise us up from the ground,  
To bask in the light of his glory  
And to bear fruit to nourish others.

Trust the seed.

Trust our risen Savior.

Rest in Power.

Rise in Power.

Amen.

Sermon Art: "*Botanical Art Illustration*" by [Lara Call Gastinger](#)

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