

Act in faith – the burden of outcome is not on you

[Psalm 92: 1-8, 12-15 and Mark 4:26-34](#)

Songs:

I the Lord of Sea and Sky - [Luther Nordic Choir - Here I am, Lord - arr. Ovid Young - YouTube](#)

For I'm building a people of power - [For I'm Building a People of Power \(Ingrid DuMosch\) \[with lyrics for congregations\] - YouTube](#)

The sermon topic this morning is "Act in faith-the burden of outcome is not on you." This is what came through strongly to me when reading the passage from Mark 4:26-34 as I prepared for this morning.

What struck me is that you and I are called to action. To move. And we are to do so in faith without carrying the burden as to how God will use these actions in growing his kingdom. And you and I are to know that even our smallest actions are important and will be used. I believe that this is a message appropriate to our time. We are in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic and our meeting with others and interacting with others is still restricted. What can you and I do to act in faith in these times? I will come back to this.

Have you ever noticed that as John the Baptist, Jesus and Peter commenced their public ministry they made an almost identical call on their listeners, and on us?

3 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."¹

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."²

And Peter at the time of Pentecost, when the gift of the Holy Spirit was given, was asked by those around him what they were to do he said:

"38 Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."³

Do you hear that the call is to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

¹ [Matthew 3:2 and Mark 1:15](#)

² [Matthew 4:17](#)

³ [Acts 2:38](#)

This is a call to action. It is not just a call to think about something. It is a call to do something. And it gives the reason why: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

"*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" What did John, Peter and Jesus mean by this?

Also, what does repent, mean in this context? ⁴It means firstly that there must be conscious action. It is a call to turn around. To make a complete change of direction – a 180° turn. To live your life responding to what has been done for you. Participate in the kingdom of heaven. Play your part in the great commission. Play your part in the spreading of the gospel and the building up of the church.

But I'm running ahead of myself.

I want us to look at the passage from Mark 4:26-34.

In this chapter, Jesus teaches by using parables, and he takes time to explain the meaning of the parables to the disciples. Three of the parables in this chapter are about sowing seeds.

His audience would have been involved in farming and the production of food and the reference to planting and producing crops would have been well understood.

The first parable which we find at verses 3-8 is perhaps the best known of the three. Jesus told of the farmer who went to sow seeds for his crop. Some fell on the path and the birds ate the seed. That which fell on rocky places with little soil sprang up quickly but soon withered. The soil was too shallow. The seed that fell among thorns, grew up, but the thorns choked the plants, and no grain was produced. The seed that fell on good soil, grew, and produced a crop some multiplying 30, 60, and 100 times.

When Jesus gets the disciples alone, they asked him about the parables.

"¹¹ He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables ¹²so that,

⁴The doctrine of repentance as taught in the [Bible](#) is a call to persons to make a radical turn from one way of life to another. The repentance (*metanoia*) called for throughout the Bible is a summons to a personal, absolute and ultimate unconditional surrender to God as Sovereign. Though it includes sorrow and regret, it is more than that. It is a call to *conversion* from self-love, self-trust, and self-assertion to obedient trust and self-commitment to now live for God and his purposes. It is a change of mind that involves a conscious turning away from wrong actions, attitudes and thoughts that conflict with a Godly lifestyle and biblical commands, and an intentional turning toward doing that which the Bible says pleases God. In repenting, one makes a complete change of direction (180° turn) toward God. The words "repent," "repentance," and "repented" are mentioned over 100 times in the Bible. From: [Repentance -Wikipedia](#)

“‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’⁵

Jesus then explained this parable to his disciples. He pointed out how some listeners, hearing the gospel message, never take it in. Others hear it with joy and the seeds planted begin to grow, but their understanding is too shallow and it is lost. Others, like the seed sown amongst thorns find that the worries of this life, the distraction of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Finally, there are those who hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.

It is worth going back to read and consider this parable, but that is not what we are going to be doing this morning. What is important is that Jesus taught the disciples, as he teaches us, that when spreading the gospel message not all who hear the gospel message will bear fruit. Jesus was warning the disciples that they were not to be discouraged when this happened.

Hold this first parable in your mind as we look at the next two. Remember also that when the disciples asked Jesus to explain this first parable he said to them, *“The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you.”*

When you the next two short parables they seem easy to understand. But let's look at each of them a little closer.

Jesus, having just told his disciples that he had given them the secret of the kingdom of God begins this parable by making the statement: *“This is what the kingdom of God is like.”*

What would the disciples have understood at that point?

He goes on, then to say that the kingdom of God is like a man who scatters seeds on the ground. This first sentence is easy to understand. Then Jesus says that whether the man sleeps or gets up, whether night or day, the seeds sprout and grow. Although the man does not know how this happens. The grain is produced, the stalk, the head and

⁵ [Mark 4: 10-12 and referring to Isaiah 6: 9-10](#)

then the full kernel in the head and the grain is soon ripe. Once the grain is ripe the man harvests the grain.

Questions come to one's mind. Who is the "man" that Jesus is talking about?⁶ If it is the farmer it is not clear why the farmer would not know that once the seed was planted it would continue to grow, night and day, and whether he slept or was up. Was Jesus cautioning that once the gospel message was spread, the growth that would take place would be in God's hands until the harvest was ready?

Or was Jesus saying that the farmer was God who starts the process of planting and processes the harvest. This might work, but the statement that "he does not know how" the harvest would work can't be applied to God.

Was Jesus warning those who would spread the gospel that they were not to be impatient. They would spread the gospel, sow the seed, and then they were to be patient, as the gospel grew and spread.

And remember that Jesus had started this short parable by saying "this is what the kingdom of God is like."

Am I reading too much into these four short verses? Is Jesus emphasizing to the disciples that spreading the gospel, sowing the word, is related to the kingdom, and that the word that the disciples would plant was the seed of the kingdom itself?⁷

Was Jesus building on the first parable when he warned the disciples that as they spread the gospel, not all would listen and respond fruitfully to the message? Was he teaching them here that once they had sown the seed, the spread of the gospel and the growth of the church would take its course in God's time until the harvest took place?

Let us consider the second parable of the mustard seed told to the disciples.

Note again that as Jesus starts this parable he says: "What shall we say, the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?"

⁶ See this article for a commentary on the two parables: See: [Commentary on Mark 4:26-34 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)

⁷ See: [Commentary on Mark 4:26-34 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)

He starts off by saying the mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds on earth. This would have been understood by the disciples. The mustard seed and the mustard bush were well-known as the source of a spice that was highly regarded and well used in that area. Up to this point, this parable is easy to understand. But Jesus goes on then to say that once the smallest of all seeds is planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants. This would have confused the disciples I believe because the mustard plant doesn't grow to become the largest of all garden plants.⁸

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He goes on to say that it will be the largest of all garden plants with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.

And then he leaves it there.

Planting something small that would grow large enough with birds resting in the shade of the big branches may have brought to the minds of the disciples the words of the prophet Ezekiel⁹:

"22 "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. ... "I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.""

Do you see the similarity? In this passage the prophet Ezekiel shares what God has said to him. That God will take a shoot, a cutting from the top of a cedar and plant this small twig, a small twig that would grow to be a mighty tree bearing fruit and having many branches. Branches in which birds of every kind will nest finding their shelter. Something small planted by God will grow into something large, providing shelter. This was a Messianic promise with the shoot being a member of David's family.¹⁰

But whether or not the disciples thought of the words of Ezekiel, what would they have understood the kingdom of heaven to be?

⁸ Mustard bushes reach an average mature height of between 6 and 20 feet with a 20-foot spread, although exceptional plants can reach 30 feet tall under ideal conditions. From: [What Is the Size of a Mustard Bush? \(sfgate.com\)](http://www.sfgate.com)

⁹ [Ezekiel 17:22-24](#)

¹⁰ See: [Isaiah 11:1, Zechariah 3:8; 6:12](#)

Possibly they would have recalled the time when the Pharisees had asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. Luke records the answer given by Jesus:¹¹

““The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

With the coming of Jesus, the kingdom of God was at hand. Jesus was in their midst. Some translations record that the “kingdom of God is within you”. Referring here to the kingdom also being spiritual and internal rather than physical and external.¹²

Mark concludes these passages by recording that Jesus spoke the word to the disciples with many similar parables, as much as they could understand. He taught his listeners by using parables and when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything to them.

The question for us this morning is what we understand by these parables. A writer has indicated that the parables asks us:

“to engage our imaginations to follow the possibilities and incongruities that we distinguish between a world where everything is planned, linear and logical, to one full with mysteries and surprises into which a sovereign God invites us.”¹³

I believe that although one might ponder all debate possibilities and incongruities Jesus was giving the disciples, and us, pictures of how God works within his kingdom, and within each one of us.

We have touched on the first parable. Here, the disciples are warned that as they share the gospel message they are not to be discouraged when not all who hear the message respond to it by growing to be fruitful. This is also a warning to us. Are we truly listening to the word of God? Or do we discard it, hear it in a very shallow way, or allow it to be choked by the anxieties and distractions of this world. Are we pausing long enough to really ponder on God's word so that the seeds planted grow within us bearing fruit?

¹¹ Luke 17:20-21

¹² NIV Study Bible page 1571

¹³ See footnote 6 above.

In the second parable we see that God will nurture the seeds that we plant in faith. And he will allow them to grow without us having to control them or to bear the burden of the outcome of our actions. We are to move forward in faith, allowing the seeds planted in our hearts to grow.

In the third parable we are particularly instructed that no act of faith that we may undertake is too small or insignificant.

"Even the smallest actions, attitudes, words, and thoughts can be seeds that can grow into significant movements or realities in which God's Reign is manifest."¹⁴

We are not to take on the burden of ensuring that God's kingdom will grow throughout actions. We are to make ourselves available and to look out for opportunities to reflect God's love in our actions and our interactions with those around us.

And we must never feel that an action taken in faith is too small, or insignificant.

In practice, this may be giving a friendly smile to someone who appears to be distressed, to sharing an encouraging word, to sending an SMS or to making a phone call. To provide a meal for someone in distress, grief, joy or need.

Sometimes it is only as you take that action that you may see why you were called to do it, or to see what else needs to be done.

It is like standing on a dark night with a lantern that casts a limited amount of light around you. You can see what is in the light, but it is only as you move forward that you can see what was in the dark and not visible to you before you moved.

The pandemic that we are currently experiencing restricts our being able to gather personally together, but it does offer opportunities to reach out in different ways.

We have practical examples here at Trinity, where those who can knit have knitted Jerseys, beanies, and scarves to be distributed to children needing them.

We are in the process of delivering blankets to the children at the Charisma Drop-in centre. You may have some excess clothing or goods that you no longer use that could be distributed to those who really need them.

¹⁴ John van de Laar – Sacredise [2021-06-13-19 \(sacredise.com\)](https://sacredise.com)

You can make a list of persons in need or needing God's word and pray for them.

Don't be timid about going into action, or thinking that what you are doing is insignificant and won't make a difference.

The history of the growth of the church proves this. Jesus took what might be seen as a great risk in allowing the spread of the gospel to rest on the disciples. Yet, as they fearlessly shared the message the church began to grow, and has continued to grow over the last 2000 years. The disciples did not stop because not all of those they spoke to receive the word and bear fruit.

They trusted God to nurture and allow the seeds planted by them to grow into a bountiful harvest.

They did not regard any action as too small, or too insignificant knowing that from the smallest seed planted the largest tree would grow, bringing a place of refuge for the men and women within the body of the church.

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