

God's Timing

Mark 4:26-34

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First Presbyterian, Luling

As you know, I took up gardening only in the years since I've been here in Luling. It didn't take me long to realize that I would be much happier if I just admitted that I had no control over the process at all. I could do exactly what I was supposed to do, and bugs would eat the plant before it had even been in the ground 24 hours. Or snails, so many snails. Or a late deep freeze. Sometimes things would grow that I didn't know I had planted. Other times, the things I very much wanted to grow wouldn't. Or would grow so slowly they ran out of time to bear fruit or make vegetables. Sometimes, for reasons equally unknowable, I would actually get to eat a potato. Or tomato. Or a spoonful of black eyed peas. Working harder or more or differently didn't guarantee anything. I have no control. And I try to be ok with that, but I'm really not.

The mystery of what makes some seeds sprout, and some not, and especially when. The mystery of what makes the Kingdom of God begin and grow. The mystery of how faith begins and grows and seems not to begin or grow. The mystery of it all.

This first parable is about that. The sower plants seeds. And then all the sower does is go to sleep and get up, go to sleep and get up. All the sudden, mysteriously, in God's timing, the seeds sprout and grow. You or your children or grandchildren likely put a dried lima bean in a wet school paper towel and then put the whole mess in a Ziploc baggie and put it in front of the window. Mysteriously, the beans sprouted. How? They didn't even have any dirt. But they grew, in God's timing.

The plants continue to grow, not so much that you notice in one night, but over several days, you can tell. At the place where Anna goes for horse therapy, there is a puppy. He's a mastiff, and he has enormous feet. He's going to be a big dog. When we go each Saturday, it's barely noticeable that he's bigger than the week before. But yesterday, it had been two weeks since we'd been there, and wow had he grown. Taller and longer and stronger. He's still not grown into his feet yet, though. It will come, in God's timing.

When is the plant ready to harvest? If you've ever eaten a pear or an avocado, this will make sense to you: it's ready when it's ready. Not a moment too early, and definitely not a moment too late. At lunchtime the pear isn't quite

ready, but by lunchtime the next day, it's started to rot. Same with the avocado. The plant is ready to harvest when it is. Only God knows when that's going to be. When is the kingdom of God coming? When will that seed of faith that we think we've planted bear fruit? In God's timing is the only possible, true answer.

This first parable of the two in our reading today is a strong affirmation of the sovereignty of God, which is a pillar of Presbyterian theology. God is in control. Humans are not. God's in charge of timing. Humans most definitely are not. God gives all things, and grows all things, and harvests all things. Humans see and feel it happen but aren't ultimately responsible for making it happen. God gives faith, which grows in God's good time not in ours. Like my garden, I'd be a lot happier if I accepted that I have no control over the Kingdom of God, but I really would like to be in charge, just a little.

The second parable may be a little more familiar, because it also appears in Matthew and Luke, in somewhat different forms. Mark's version has the tiny tiny mustard seed growing up not to be a great tree, but a great shrub, spreading all over the place, completely out of control. Nobody would plant mustard seed on purpose—it took over entire fields.

Some people I know live out near Dripping Springs. Like a lot of land out in the Hill Country, it at one point was wide open prairie, with tall native grasses and the occasional tree. Streams and creeks were seasonal, of course, but pretty reliable. Again like much of the Hill Country, cattle overgrazed those tall native grasses and cedar trees hopped on the opportunity and multiplied like, well, like wild mustard plants. To the detriment of our sinuses and to the more consequential detriment of the Edwards Aquifer and the streams and creeks and wildlife, the cedars spread out everywhere, like wild mustard shrubs.

These friends near Dripping Springs have been working diligently for quite a few years to restore their piece of the Hill Country to its prairie glory. They've planted some native grasses and had to be very very patient as they waited for them to really take hold and grow. Deer, drought, other non native plants all threatened them. Years they've waited, but they can now see progress. They used to have a fenced in vegetable garden. Fenced to keep the deer out, of course. This year, instead of planting vegetables, they decided to use their fenced in garden for something else. Wildflowers. They'd tried to scatter some seed before, outside the fence, but it hadn't really taken off. So they decided it needed a little extra protection, and it worked. They grew and bloomed and started to spread. Maybe they'll spread like mustard bushes.

If their prairie had been left to God's timing, or tended more carefully in decades gone by, there would have been no need to plant prairie grass or wildflowers. They would have grown in the mysterious way of growing things. And maybe they still will, in God's timing and not in our own.

The Kingdom of God is ultimately, God's. Just like everything else, including us. And God's kingdom will sprout and grow and bloom and bear fruit and spread in God's timing. Just like everything else, including us. We will grow and bloom and bear fruit and spread faith. In God's timing.

But that is not to say that we sit around passively, waiting for something to happen. There are forces working against God's kingdom and God's timing, like the overgrazers in the Hill Country. We can tend and nurture faith in ourselves and create conditions where it is most likely to grow. We can spread out that seed in the fenced off places.

In God's timing, the seed will sprout, faith will grow and mature, God's grace will spread in ways that surpass our imaginings. All in God's timing. In the meantime, let us keep and tend the faith.