

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

By the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, Founder of Crossways International
(Sola Publishing, Edited Version © 2023 H. Wendt)



Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Mark 4:26-34

Year B - Proper 6, Text: Mark 4:26-34
Year B - Proper 6, Text: Mark 4:26-34

Jesus continues his travels across Galilee, through areas outside of towns, and to the coast of the Sea of Galilee. The Kingdom of God is not to be linked to any specific place in the world — be it a house, a town, a synagogue, or the fields — and it is not an otherworldly entity. The Kingdom of God is *people* — and it has arrived wherever people are liberated from the forces of evil and gathered as forgiven brothers and sisters into Jesus' servant-family.

Having explained to his disciples the rationale for speaking in parables (Mark 4:10-12), today's pericope includes two parables.

Mark 4:26-29: The Parable of the Farmer

Only Mark includes this brief kingdom parable found in Mark 4:26–29. Its message is that, in and through Jesus, the seeds of the Kingdom of God have been sown, and the Kingdom's growth is inevitable.

Verse 26: The farmer sows during the planting season, and then goes about his daily business.

Verse 27: Nature ushers forth the sprouting and growing without consulting the farmer.

Verse 28: Within the forces of nature (God's hands, not human hands) lie the powers of the sprouting and maturing process.

Verse 29: When the maturing process is complete, the farmer harvests the crop. Although he plants and reaps, God alone is the one who brings to pass the sprouting and growth process.

Does Jesus mean that the efforts of man are as nothing compared with the plan of God? Does He mean that God's Kingdom will make its way into the world despite all opposition — but quietly and without the fanfare of a political messianic movement? Does He mean that the ages will continue to unfold in a stately manner as the Last Day draws nearer? Most likely, the passage contains elements of all three ideas.

The final verse (v. 29) states in simple terms the profound elements associated with the Grand Finale to history. It reflects the spirit of Malachi 3:1.

Mark 4:30–32: The Parable of the Mustard Seed

The focus here is on the concept of the Kingdom of God that has broken into history with Jesus. Jesus refers to a mustard seed to get His message across — a seed that was believed to be the smallest of seeds, even though it is not. The tiny mustard seed produces something eight to ten feet high — a giant among the garden-herbs with which it may be compared. The message is that the Kingdom's seemingly minute beginning is in dramatic contrast to the magnitude of its eventual full growth.

Jesus' parable echoes the Old Testament figure that describes Israel as a carefully nurtured cedar tree, the leaves of which provide shade and the branches refuge for all the birds of the air.

However, in the Marcan context, the thing most worthy of note is the unpretentious beginning of something that, with the passing of time, will render blessed service to many.

Verses 4:33–34: In getting His message across to the crowds and His disciples, Jesus used images appropriate to their level of understanding. Here, Mark de-emphasizes (what is to many) the puzzling nature of Jesus' parables.

After sharing the message of 4:26–34, Jesus does not do any more teaching with parables until the “parable in action” expressed in the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:12–14, 20) and later the story of the vine-dressers (Mark 12:1–12).

Some summary thoughts: In Mark's opening chapters, Jesus initiates His disciples into the mystery of the Kingdom of God. The kingdoms of this world are very different from the Kingdom of God. People are

suffering and Satan (the great deceiver) is still powerful. Yet in the end there will be a victory. The seeds of the Kingdom of God have been sown, and its process of growth is inevitable.

The minuteness of the Kingdom's embryonic state provides a dramatic contrast to the magnitude of its eventual full growth. The contents of Mark 4:13–32 have much to say about the mystery of the Kingdom of God in terms of a process of growth. These truths are things that the disciples and “those about Him” must deal with as they join Jesus on his journey across the Sea of Galilee (next pericope).