

God's Garden

Mark 4:26-34

What is the Kingdom of God like? No, really. Tell me. How would **you** describe the Kingdom of God? [brainstorm]

E pule kākou. Let us pray together. "Dear God, we try to describe your Kingdom. But you are more wonderful than we can describe. More wise than we understand. More gracious than we can imagine. More loving than we can dream. We fail at describing you because you are so amazing and we are so small. Help us to know you. Amen."

Describing the Kingdom of God is a challenging task, isn't it? No matter how we describe it, the Kingdom of God is better and more amazing than our human words can say. If we say it is one thing, no matter how good that thing, the Kingdom of God is better.

In our passage, Jesus takes another approach to describing the Kingdom of God. In this chapter of Mark, he describes God's Kingdom with three parables about seeds. Jesus says what God is doing is like what happens with seeds in a garden. We all know about seeds, don't we? We take a seed and plant it. We fertilize, water, weed, prune and watch. [repeat] Gardens are hard work.

We plant a small brown hard thing in the ground, and something amazing happens. The seed is destroyed. It splits open: it dies. Out of this death, something new and soft and green emerges. What comes forth is not at all like what we planted in the ground. Something entirely new happens. Something different than what died comes alive. The Kingdom of God is like this...

We do not need a college degree to become a seed planter, do we? We do not have to have a seed planting license from the State of Hawai'i. We don't have to get a permit, or pay GET tax. We plant the seed and the seed does not care who we are, whether we are an ali'i or a mere commoner, kane or wahin-eh. The seed does not care if we are good or bad. Pono or not. The Bible says it rains on the righteous and unrighteous, because God's grace is available for everyone! **Everyone** can plant a seed. The Kingdom of God is like this: it depends on the seed—not the one who plants the seed.

All through Lent this last year we talked about how we were **transformed** as children of God. Our parables today remind us that the Kingdom of God is a transformative garden—a place where death becomes life and seeds become food, where caterpillars become butterflies, where po'e ma'a mau – ordinary people-- become hanai children of God. But these seed and garden parables also remind us that it is **God's** grace and goodness that transforms us. This is not about **us** working hard. This is about the mystery of God's work **in** us. The Kingdom of God is like this...

You see, the mystery of the growing seed is profound. The dead seed gives up its old life; it cracks open, transforming; being born anew. We don't know how this happens. **But it happens**. The Kingdom of God is like this. We watch and wait and something dies, is reborn, and the harvest comes even while we are sleeping. Even while we are sinful or sad or lost or just being po'e ma'a mau. This mystery of the Kingdom of God is beyond words. It is glorious, amazing, and beyond our imagining. The Kingdom of God is like this...

Jesus keeps trying to teach the disciples about the Kingdom of God. But they, and WE, have a hard time letting go of the Kingdoms of the world, don't we, and we struggle to imagine a new transformative kingdom where grace and unconditional love replace human toil. In the Kingdoms of the world we have to work hard, we have to till and water and compost and carry away the weeds. But in the Kingdom of God, the garden grows through grace and unconditional love, and though we may plant, GOD grows the harvest, and we gather the harvest when it is time. Imagine a place where we plant the seeds, **God** transforms the garden, the **Holy Spirit** prepares the harvest for us, and we, walking with Jesus in the garden, reap the fruits of the spirit. Imagine this new Kingdom of God, **where nothing depends on us**, and everything depends on God.

In our second parable, Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like a small mustard seed that grows into a large tree with a flock of birds in it. In the middle-east, mustard grows everywhere: it's a weed. You can cut it down, but it just regrows. The mustard plants are straggly and only chest high—not impressive plants at all. But our parable stretches this truth to where the mustard plant becomes impossibly large, big and strong enough to have a flock of birds resting in it. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures birds represent the nation of Israel, here flocking to rest in the branches of the Kingdom of God where the smallest of seed is transformed into an impossibly huge weed. Jesus describes the Kingdom of God as an ugly weed that becomes something far more, transformed into a beautiful place that welcomes **everyone** in protection and nurture. The Kingdom of God is like this...

Our passage ends with an extraordinary twist. It tells us that Jesus spoke in parables to help the people use their imagination to envision what the Kingdom of God is like. But we know through the rest of the Gospel of Mark, that the disciples never quite seemed to get it, did they? **But are we any different?** Even though Jesus encourages **us** to imagine a totally new way of being transformed into the Kingdom of God, **we** also drag our feet, just like the disciples. We think we know what the Kingdom of God is like. Since that little incident in the garden of Eden, we know humanity must toil and work in the garden. But today we are reminded that the **Kingdom of God** is like a garden that grows **without** our labor, a place where grace and unconditional love replace the toil of humanity. The Kingdom of God is like this...

And we are reminded that the Kingdom of God is not somewhere **out there**. It is here, in Lahaina, at Waiola, in this very place, in **this** garden of God: **THIS** is the Kingdom of God. **We** are the ones who plant the seeds of aloha, the seeds of maluhia—of peace, the seeds of walking pono. **We** are the ones who come to live with God, planting seeds in God's garden, **right here**. **We** are the ones watching this garden grow. Remember when this cemetery was all weeds and brown and neglected? Look here now. Smell the plumeria, feel the green grass on your feet. But as you walk through this green garden, notice even now that some plants still do die. A crown flower gets too old, or an ancient palm tree the King planted becomes brown and dies. We do not know the mystery of the grace of God, what will grow and what will die. It is a mystery, and all we can do is walk with Jesus in this garden of Waiola a me Waine'e. The Kingdom of God is like this, starting as the smallest seed of **your** love and care for the 'aina and one another. The Kingdom of God

blossoms forth in beauty until God takes us home. Come, let us all be transformed and gather the harvest of aloha that grows in this garden of Waiola church.

For you see, **this** [wave hand all around] **is what the kingdom of God is like**. Someone scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether they sleep or get up, the seed sprouts and grows, though the planter does not know how. In the Kingdom of God the soil itself produces the grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, then the planter puts the sickle to it, because now, the harvest has come.

For you see, **this** [pause] **is what the kingdom of God is like**.
Amene.