

A Storytelling Commentary on Mark 4:26-34

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In these two parables, Jesus is speaking about the kingdom of God. The first parable is about the difference between the farmer who lets things happen and the farmer who is anxious and tries to control everything. He puts in the seed, sleeps, rises, and lets it be until the time for the harvest. Then he takes action and harvests the fruit. The analogy of this parable is to God as the invisible power who brings about the harvest. It is about the attitude of those who are looking for the kingdom of God and have confidence that it is working. God is growing God's government in the world and what we can do is to sow the seeds. But it is God who will bring about growth and development. When the time of completion comes, it is time to gather the harvest. This is a parable about patience and about waiting for God's harvest.

It is also a parable about the Good News of the kingdom of God. It is assurance that in the midst of times when it appears that nothing is happening and the powers of this age are completely in control, something good is growing that you may not have recognized. It is a call to pay attention to what is growing which you may have overlooked. It is a parable about the dynamic of the kingdom of God and the sheer energy of God's action, which often is not seen or recognized.

The second parable is the parable of the mustard seed. I suggest that you tell the beginning of it very quietly to emphasize the phrase, "the smallest of all the seeds." The dynamic of the parable is the contrast between the smallness of the seed and the greatness of the harvest. The contrast between the small seed and the big shrub is what you want to convey in the telling of this parable. It is a parable of great good cheer and even laughter in the delight of the large branches and the birds of the air and making nests in the shade.

This is a parable for all little things in relation to the kingdom of God. It is a response to discouragement about the kingdom of God. Jesus is responding to people who have given up hope and who no longer see the possibility of anything new coming to be. He is responding to those for whom all of his preaching about the coming of the kingdom of God is interesting, but who are basically cynical or despairing about the possibility of anything really changing. Jesus addresses that spirit with both of these parables about the kingdom of God.