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**Sunday 13 June to Sunday 20 June 2021**

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Sunday 13 June 2021

# What makes seeds grow?

by Kathy Matuschka

**Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how (Mark 4:26,27).**

This week’s readings employ agricultural imagery to help us understand the mystery of the kingdom of God.

Read Mark 4:26–34

Do you know how a seed sprouts and grows? I am both astounded by the agricultural technology and expertise available today and inspired by the farmers who apply it in their daily work. At one level, we could say that today we know a lot more about seed germination than people did in Jesus’ time.

But still today, no-one can produce a seed and make it grow. That is God’s work. I have watched friends negotiate the ups and downs of prolonged drought: sometimes crops do pretty well despite minimal rain, and other times, crops are ruined by rain only days before the harvest was due. When it comes to producing a harvest, many things can trump hard work, expertise, materials and technology.

Jesus uses planting and harvesting metaphors to help us imagine what the kingdom of God is like. The strange thing is that in contrast to my skilled and hard-working friends, the farmer in today’s parable doesn’t seem to be putting in much effort at all. Did the farmer plough the ground before scattering the seed? Does the farmer, in fact, sleep or get up and work? We aren’t told. This agricultural account sounds so casual that I wonder if this sort of farmer even deserves to see a good harvest.

And yet the harvest comes, the growth that we cannot guarantee, control or predict. The growth that isn’t about us. What kind of kingdom is this?

**Dear God, I could spend a lifetime trying to make sense of what you are doing and how you are doing it. For today, I thank you for welcoming me into your kingdom and assuring me of your love and provision. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Monday 14 June 2021

# The secret of the kingdom of God

by Kathy Matuschka

**He told them, ‘The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you’ (Mark 4:11a).**

Read Mark 4:1–12

This is confusing. Jesus tells his disciples the secret of the kingdom of God has been given to them, whereas the outsiders are told truths via parables. But Jesus’ disciples don’t seem to understand either Jesus’ straight talk or his parables! So why does Jesus say that the secret of the kingdom of God has been given to them?

Today, when we refer to ‘the secret’ in this way, we tend to refer to information (for example, a secret ingredient) or a technique (for example, the steps of a process).

No wonder we have trouble noticing the obvious – that Jesus is not referring to information or a process but himself: Jesus is the secret. Jesus has been given to the disciples and you and me also.

Do you know the secret of the kingdom of God? I hope so.

Jesus offers this key, or secret, as he tells this parable of the sower. He invites us not to look at the soil conditions but at him. In the kingdom of God, it’s not about trying our best to be fertile soil. It’s not about judging and correcting others when they seem to be choked up by the cares of life. The secret is unearthed not through our productivity but in receiving Jesus. He is the secret of the kingdom of God in all the ways he is present: in Christian community, in the written word of God, in the sacraments, in suffering, in paradoxes, ambiguity and unpredictability. The secret is gradually revealed as we live an ordinary life with its ups and downs, with our good days and our bad, our times of plenty and scarcity, in the presence of Jesus, in the power of God’s Holy Spirit and to the praise of our Creator.

**Dear Jesus, thank you for the many ways you reveal yourself and your heart to me. By your Holy Spirit, please continue to teach and inspire me to know you and share you in a world that so needs to know this secret. Amen.**

Tuesday 15 June 2021

**Living with the thorns**

by Kathy Matuschka

**Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life choke the word, making it unfruitful (Mark 4:18,19).**

Read Mark 4:13–23

It is so easy to categorise ourselves and others in this parable. We might pray: ‘Dear Lord, don’t let me be the one who is so choked by thorns that I become unfruitful. I want to be productive for your kingdom.’ As if we are afraid that we’ll let God down.

I’ve often wished to have a life free of challenges and difficulties so that I can be the Christian I’d like to be, praising God in perfection and purity! But I know that if I do not face personal challenges, I tend to become self-righteous.

Why didn’t the sower pull out the thorns before sowing so that the crop would be less compromised? One reason thorns were retained in the fields was to provide fuel for a fire, to keep the workers warm. So, thorns have their purpose.

Each of us faces thorny bushes at some time in our lives. Thorny experiences remind us that the kingdom of God and its harvest is not about us and our exemplary faithfulness. When we experience a fruitful harvest, it can be so easy to believe it is the result of our wonderful soil management and weed control. But that is not true.

One of the mysteries of the kingdom of God is the thorns that could reduce our fruitfulness can also be the stimulus to stop admiring our own efforts and instead dig deep into God’s mercy and provision.

And one more thing: As we strive to be good followers of Jesus, we can be surprised to discover that some of the thorns are not only surrounding us but are also within us.

**Dear Jesus, it’s hard to give thanks for thorns, but I do thank you for the opportunity thorns provide to better understand your grace and my need for it. Please help me to keep my focus on you and not on the thorns. Amen.**

Wednesday 16 June 2021

# It’s God’s field

by Kathy Matuschka

**I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow (1 Corinthians 3:6).**

Read 1 Corinthians 3:4–11

Are you planting seeds in the kingdom of God? Are you watering seeds someone else has sown? Maybe you’re not sure what you are doing at the moment.

In the western world, if we look at our Sunday morning ‘harvest’ and compare it with the number of people who are doing something else on a Sunday morning, we can wonder what we are doing and what God is doing. Our planting and the watering don’t seem to be producing the same yield as they once did.

In this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhMDdy3fIPA&t=213s&ab_channel=michiganLCMSDistrict>, Rev Dr Bob Newton explains how the status of the church in society has changed over recent decades. In short, the church is now the ‘outsider’. This shouldn’t be news to you.

But in a way, this is simply a return to our roots. Consider that 1 Corinthians (and, in fact, the whole New Testament) was written in this same context! Long before the church became the ‘insider,’ God’s Spirit was at work, growing the kingdom of God.

Whether believers were gathered in homes, in secret places like catacombs, or debating in synagogues and other public places, the growth of the church was always God’s work. Today’s text reminds us about this.

Today through the ministries of the LCANZ, seeds are planted and watered within our families and friendships, schools and early childhood services, youth, community and aged-care services, as well as in congregations.

Wherever you are today, that is where God is making things grow – because God’s Spirit is planted within you. Whether you are planting, harvesting, watching the ground for new shoots or somewhere in between, the Lord will make the seeds grow. Keep planting and watering!

**God of the harvest, please give me eyes to see and ears to hear where you are at work around me making things grow, and give me the courage to join in, even in fields that are unfamiliar to me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Thursday 17 June 2021

# All in, preparing for the harvest

by Kathy Matuschka

**Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Galatians 6:9).**

Read Galatians 6:1–10

Today’s passage concerns itself with our behaviour in Christian community. In a few verses, the author weaves together the interplay between our interdependence with one another within faith communities and the personal responsibility each of us has for our own behaviour.

For example, the readers are admonished to ‘carry each other’s burdens’ (verse 2) and share what we have learnt (verse 6) but also examine ourselves and carry our own load (verses 3–5).

So one would assume that when verse 9 above calls us to ‘not become weary of doing good’, the author is addressing us as both individuals and communities. Each of us has a personal responsibility to sow to please the Spirit (verse 8), but we are also made for community, and we do our best good when we pull together.

At the proper time, our attention to doing good will lead to a harvest, not because of what we do but because Jesus did all that was needed and draws us into his new life. While we need to keep sowing to see a harvest, the duration of the seasons can vary a lot! We could see the fruit of doing good immediately, or we could wait years. Sometimes it is only subsequent generations who experience the full extent of the harvest.

‘Let us not become weary in doing good’ (verse 9). While we don’t get to say what the harvest will be, and the growth is the work of God’s Spirit and not our own efforts, through a blessed mystery, turning up and participating in God’s work does make a difference.

**Gracious God, may your Spirit enable me to keep doing good and help and encourage others in my faith community to also give their best in your service. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Friday 18 June 2021

# Waiting patiently

by Kathy Matuschka

**Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop (James 5:7).**

Read James 5:7–11

Yesterday I mentioned how it may be future generations who see the extent of what God’s Spirit is doing among us now. If we look into our brief history as a Christian church in Australia and New Zealand, I expect it is true that those who went before us wouldn’t recognise the LCANZ of today with its many fields (for example, early childhood services, schools, youth and multicultural ministries, aged and community care) within our wider communities.

Many believe that the Christian church in the west is experiencing a ‘liminal’ period, a threshold between the past and the way things worked then, and a future way of being, which at the moment we can only glimpse.

We know that one day, we will realise the kingdom of God in all its glory. But between now and that day, not all is clear. It is like we are seeds under the ground, undergoing transformation.

There are other seeds in the ground with us. We need to be patient, both with ourselves and all we cannot see and do and with one another (our neighbouring seeds) as they also see only dimly.

As people who know how the story ends, but who for now, need to be buried each day with Christ, we need to sit with our anxieties about what we cannot see, and instead, trust the process and the One who is transforming us.

See how the farmer waits.

**Dear God, it is hard to wait, especially when I am anxious or uncomfortable. Keep drawing me to yourself because, in your presence, I am renewed by your love and filled with your peace and hope. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Saturday 19 June 2021

**God’s wonderful deeds of the deep**

by Kathy Matuschka

**They saw the works of the Lord, his wonderful deeds in the deep (Psalm 107:24).**

Read Psalm 107:1–3,23–32

There are no seeds or agriculture in the reading today, but the imagery is still intricately connected with nature. The psalmist recalls the stories of sailors who have safely returned from sailing in treacherous conditions and encountered and recognised God’s presence in the storms.

While the Lord stirred up the tempest (verse 25), it is also the Lord who responded to their cry for help (verse 28), ‘stilled the storm to a whisper’ (verse 29) and guided the sailors home (verse 30).

Life has its storms, and we can never fully prepare for a storm we haven’t encountered before. We do well to develop our faithful practices, such as reading God’s word, receiving the sacraments, praying and staying in Christian fellowship during times of calm so that they are familiar companions during the storms.

In the storms and the troughs, we learn that God is always, always, underneath us. As we encounter the limits of our own resources, we learn to submit to the transformation that God’s Holy Spirit would work within us. When we cannot see the horizon or even imagine that we will ever see it again, we learn to trust the One who knows and sees all things. Slowly, we learn to trust the process of dying so that we can live and learn other mysteries of God’s kingdom.

**Dear loving God, help me to join the psalmist in acclaiming your ‘wonderful deeds in the deep’. I pray for those I know who are experiencing stormy times at the moment so that they will also know you are underneath them. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Sunday 20 June 2021

# Sleeping through a storm

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, ‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ (Mark 4:38).**

Read Mark 4:35–41

In today’s reading, we find the disciples amid a chaotic, fear-inducing storm. The wind was blowing ferociously, and the waves of water were crashing into their boat. If you’ve ever been caught in a serious storm, you know this is no joke – let alone when you’re out on a huge body of water. There is something truly awesome when the forces of nature are unleashed in their fury, and we realise just how little control we have over our own circumstances.

But during the storm, there is another problem. It troubles the disciples, perhaps even more than the physical elements, namely, the apparent lack of care and concern from Jesus. He’s asleep! Isn’t it true that problems we have in life are made even worse by the reality that those close to us don’t seem to treat them with the same seriousness? This is even more so the case when it comes to God.

In response, Jesus exercises his divine power by speaking peace and calmness to the storm, as well as calling for greater faith from his disciples. They recognise they are in the presence of no mere man, and the awe previously evoked by the storm is redirected to Jesus himself. The final question of the text is the main point: ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’

We know who he is. He is Christ Jesus, the Son of God, and our Saviour. He has come from the Father on a mission to restore peace to the chaos of this sinful world by dying, rising and sending his Spirit. Indeed, there is much in this world to fear with threats all around. But let us never mistake the apparent inactivity of God for his indifference to our plight. On the contrary, no matter what we face, our Lord Jesus promises to be ‘in the boat’ with us, and he has all authority. Trust him.

**Heavenly Father, my life sometimes feels like I’m in the midst of a storm. I fear, and I lack faith. Be near to me in your Son Jesus, and by the power of your Spirit, bring me comfort and strengthen my faith. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**