

Third Sunday after Pentecost

HEARING JESUS

Mark 4:26-34

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Analysis by Bill White

26 He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27 and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28 The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

30 He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34 he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

DIAGNOSIS: Deaf to Christ

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Discouraged*

As was true in Mark's day, and the same problem exists for some folks in the church today: people become frustrated, impatient, and discouraged by the lack of response to our efforts to grow the kingdom of God. Congregational leaders lament, "Our church is not growing. In spite of our programs, preaching and teaching, planning, building facilities, and hard work, growth is just not happening. In fact, our attendance is declining! How very discouraging!"

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Disillusioned*

This discouragement reveals the deeper problem with the folks who think, talk, and act like this. They are not hearing Jesus as the Son of God. If their faith were truly in Jesus Christ they would hear his teaching in these parables about the kingdom of God. They would trust his teaching that growth in the kingdom takes place totally apart from human effort and apart from human understanding (v. 27). They would "hear" Jesus teaching that growth cannot be coerced or forced. They would be encouraged by the parable of the mustard seed that God will bring about the fulfillment of the Kingdom in God's own time, no matter how small or insignificant things may appear today.

But no. Their faith is in human programs, plans, hard work, etc., and this keeps them from hearing God in Jesus Christ. And seeing no results, no growth from their efforts leaves them disillusioned about the whole Christian enterprise. Congregational leaders lament, "We've tried everything and yet, our church is still dying. Maybe this Jesus Christ / kingdom of God stuff isn't really true after all..."

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Dead*

Being deaf to Christ is being dead to Christ. These folks who are trusting in their own efforts and resources to bring about growth in the kingdom of God are destined not only for discouragement, depression, and disillusionment, but also death.

Apart from Christ they have no part in the Kingdom. Congregational leaders lament, "If Christianity were really true I would see some growth, some results from all of my efforts. I quit. I'm out of here..." And, so they are—out of God's kingdom.

PROGNOSIS: Hearing Christ

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Kingdom of God Is Here*

But in spite of the lack of evidence, the kingdom of God is here. Jesus has proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (1:15). And in Mark we see that the gospel we are to believe in is Jesus himself, and that Jesus has come to fulfill God's promises about the salvation of the world. Jesus did take the sins of the world upon himself and sacrifice his life on the cross. By his death and resurrection Jesus has overcome the forces of evil and the power of sin and death, including the sin of turning a deaf ear to his teaching. In Jesus Christ we are invited to see and hear God, the one true God who desires to rule and reign in our lives.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Hearing Confirms Faith*

Moreover, the resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to work the gift of faith within folks just like us. Jesus is made present to us by the Holy Spirit's power, power that enables "hearing" Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God. Listening to the parables of Jesus with Holy-Spirit-powered hearing aids, we now "hear" Jesus teaching that growth cannot be coerced or forced. Faith enables us to trust that God is doing the work of the kingdom and growing the kingdom and that God will bring about the fulfillment of the kingdom in God's own time. Congregation leaders laud, "Be encouraged. Be confident in faith. There is nothing to be depressed or disillusioned about!

The kingdom of God is here. We get to repent and believe in the gospel.”

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Hearing Inspires Confident Living*

Better still, “hearing” the parables of Jesus and his explanations enables and inspires us to live our lives confidently trusting the promises of Christ. This is especially true in the most difficult of circumstances when we see no evidence of the kingdom of God, not to mention growth in the kingdom. Yet we know Jesus is the Christ and his kingdom is here. Church leaders laud, “Proving the kingdom does not depend on me. Growing the kingdom of God does not depend on me. It is happening whether I see any evidence or not. I’m called to keep the faith and proclaim the kingdom, not grow the kingdom... what a relief! And wow, Jesus has done all this in order that I might be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead, and lives and reigns for all eternity. Yeah, this IS most certainly true!”