



## Family Connections

### 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday (Year B)



Mark 4: 26 – 34

Such a large crowd gathered around Jesus that he got into a boat and began to teach them using many parables.

Jesus said: “The kingdom of God is as if a man would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, without his knowing how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

Jesus also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 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.”

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



Reflection:

Sometimes it is hard to put things into words. Sometimes a picture or a story makes it easier. In using the image of seeds, Jesus tells us that we play a role in God’s kingdom. We can work the soil, sow the seed, water and prevent the weeds from growing. But we cannot force the seed to grow – only God can do that. Sometimes the seed is very tiny, sometimes nothing seems to happen; it is amazing how many times we have to trust in God, so that his kingdom may include all the many people of the world.



Table Discussion (at mealtime):

If God’s kingdom is like a seed, what are some of the things you can do to help it grow in your heart and in the heart of other people? What are the things that will slow or stop its growth?



**St. Peter Chanel** (a bedtime story):

The seeds of faith have been scattered all over the world, including the remote islands of the South Pacific, where for hundreds of years no one had ever heard of Jesus Christ.

That all changed in 1837, when a young French priest landed on the island of Futuna and began to learn the language of the people of that place. The priest's name was Peter Chanel. The first three years were a struggle. The language was hard to learn, the people were not willing to hear what he had to say and the weather was so hot that Peter's clothes were often soaked with sweat. Even then, Peter never lost his sense of humour and remained upbeat in all that he did. When asked by his helper, "How are you able to remain so positive and kind under such difficult conditions?", Peter simply replied, "In such difficult work one has to be holy."

After three years of hard work, Peter was finally seeing some growth in faith among the Futunians. Not only had he managed to teach and baptize a few of the children, he had also managed to convince a few of the elders to become Christians. It was as if the seeds that he had been planting, through all his hard work, were slowly beginning to grow. Even the king's son was beginning to show interest to know more about Jesus and God's wonderful promise of new life.

It was then that the king of the island grew angry with Peter's work. He was afraid that Peter's influence, over his son and his people, would reduce the power and influence he had over his people. Peter found out about the king's anger and realized his life might be in danger. But what could he do? He loved the people of Futuna so much, and he loved the ones who were now coming to church, that he couldn't leave them without the presence of a priest. When his helper asked Peter: "Do you think it is wise for you to stay?" Peter simply answered, "It is not a matter whether or not I am killed, Christianity has taken root on this island; neither my life nor my death will change that."

Peter was killed a few weeks later. One of the king's men killed him with an axe. But, instead of stopping the seed of Christianity from growing, the message of Christ's love began to grow and grow. On seeing the great love that Peter had for them, everyone wanted to learn more about Jesus, the source of Peter's great love for them. Whereas, at first, they had been slow to listen, now hundreds of them were baptized, and news of Jesus, and the kingdom of God, spread to other islands near and far.

The kingdom of God is like a small seed. It starts out so small, you wonder, "How could it ever become a plant?" But as we can see with Peter's life, and his love for Christ and the Futunians, the little seed of faith will grow and grow, we do not always know when or how, until everyone comes to believe.

**The Miracle of Life** (Planting seeds):

This is a wonderful time to plant some seeds. Have the children record what happens to the seed each day. Have them relate it to their own lives (i.e. "Days when there seems to be nothing happening – how do we know there is nothing happening? It might be happening inside the seed/us." "Small changes day-by-day – bigger changes over time. Comparing the appearances of leaves, roots, etc. with their own growth spurts." "You may even want to talk about some of the changes that you see in them – more caring, understanding, etc."). Talk about the work and the patience that is required.

This is a wonderful project for ongoing conversations about the growth of plants and our own growing up. You can't see it happening in the moment, only over time. It might be nice to share your child's growth chart (i.e. The first tooth, the first time they ate, the first time they crawled, their first word, etc).



### **Journal Exercise:**

Have you ever taken some time to reflect on how your love for someone has grown? It could be for your spouse, your child, a brother or sister, your parents or a friend. It could also be your love for God and for His Son, Jesus. Take some time to write about it in a prayer journal (or spend some time pondering and treasuring it in your heart). You may want to begin with the initial seed; how did your love get started? What caused it to grow? What were the challenges, the struggles, the obstacles? Was there anything that needed to be overcome? How did love deepen and what were the things that were being asked of you?

Take some time to reflect on the reasons why you love the person now, and the quality of that love. How has it changed or deepened from that very first choice to love them? Its fun and important to watch seeds grow, even if we don't always fully know how.



### **The Parable of the Store (a bedtime story):**

I went for a walk one day, along a familiar street. When, lo and behold, I saw a store, one I had never seen before. "That's weird," I said, "That's strange, indeed. I better go inside, to see, to browse, to investigate, to take a closer look."

Once inside, how quaint a store it was, with shelves and shelves, and rows and rows, of vessels filled with seeds. "Peace on Earth," said one, while another label read, "Love". "Forgiveness," too, and "Food for All," "Kindness," "Generosity," and more. Jars and jars, all labeled, too, seeds and seeds, that's all.

"What's this?" I asked the clerk. "I do not understand. Jars and jars of seeds you sell, as far as the eye can see. Jars with promises that all of us want, but not a one fulfilled."

"Well, good sir," the clerk replied, a smile across her face. "All good things begin as seeds, from seed all things must grow. "Peace on Earth," "Good Will to All," these things must all be sown. For those who sow will harvest, too. Some thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold, sometimes even more.



### **Meditation on a seed:**

With seed in hand  
I stand before you, God.

Look at it, and tell me now;  
O so tiny, O so small,  
what good is it,  
after all?

And yet so precious,  
so dear to me,  
more dear than gold itself,  
that, should I sow it,  
and let it fall,  
to do what it can do,  
this little seed will multiply  
bread enough for all.

With seed in hand  
I stand before you, God,  
my faith, my life, my love,  
so small.

But precious like a seed they are.  
For if I sow them bit by bit,  
they'll grow and grow,  
I don't know how,  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
my God, my life, my all.

Now it is your turn. Hold a seed in your hand. Write your own meditation or poem. Remember, all things begin as a seed. The Kingdom of God does, too.