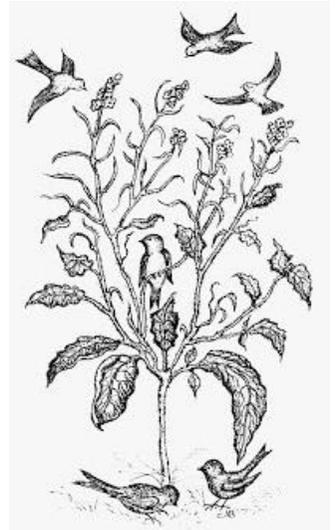


- (f) What do these parables have in common and in what ways are they different?
- (f) What points is Mark making here about the ways in which Jesus used parables?

For Further Reflection:

4. (a) In this passage, we see Jesus both spreading the message of the kingdom and teaching about how the kingdom grows.

What lessons can we learn about evangelism both from his example and from his teaching?



NB Jesus was happy for people to listen openly and be curious about what he was saying, to have those on the inside ask for more and go more deeply as is suggested in vv.10-11. Sometimes we feel the pressure to explain the whole gospel all at once to people. WRIGHT

- (b) How might we instead help them become more curious and be motivated to go more deeply into what Jesus is all about?

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

SESSION 5: CHAPTER 4: 1 - 34 "KINGDOM PARABLES"



Some stories wear their points on the sleeves, as it were. Others, to borrow from P.G. Woodhouse's definition of a parable, keep something up their sleeves "which suddenly pops up and knocks you flat." Among the stories of Jesus we find a variety - from those that are easy to understand, to those that are so difficult they invite our thought and reflection again and again. The stories in this passage contain vital information about God's kingdom and its subjects - for those who have ears to hear!

Read Mark 4: 1-12

QUESTIONS:

- 1(a). How does Mark set the scene in these opening verses?
- (b) What is Jesus doing when he tells parables? Is it just a simple story?
- (c) How did the disciples react to this story?



What did Jesus have to tell them?

Verses 11-12 have long bothered many readers. The problem is that it looks like Jesus is saying that he tells parables to keep people from seeking forgiveness. From the context it seems more likely that he is being critical of the disciples.

- (d) What do you think these verses mean?

NB As we have seen in Mk 1-3, Jesus has already attracted a good deal of negative attention.

He has been challenged by the authorities about forgiving sins, his attitude towards the Sabbath and feasting with sinners. His family has said he is out of his mind and the religious leaders have said he is possessed by the devil. NT Wright

- (e) As we look at vv.11-12 in this context, why might Jesus **not** want some listeners to understand what he is saying?

Read Mark 4 : 13 - 20

- 2.(a) This has normally been called the "Parable of the Sower".
Might not a better title be the Parable of the "Seeds" or that of the "Soils"? What is it really about?
- (b) To whom does Jesus explain this parable?
What did they do to get an explanation that the others did not?

- (c) What does a willingness to ask indicate about a willingness to hear?
What is the secret of the Kingdom (v.11)?

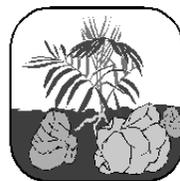
- (d) How do you understand the different types of seed-soil combinations?
Have you had experience of people like that?

- (d) How does the response Jesus gets from this parable illustrate the point he is trying to make?
What kind of soil are you?

A Sower Went Out to Sow



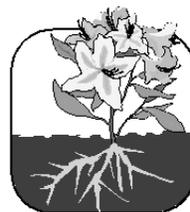
packed soil



stony ground



thorny ground



good soil

NB The problem - and this seems to be the main reason Jesus taught in parables - is that Jesus' vision of how God was sowing his word was, as we would say today, politically incorrect. People were expecting a great moment of renewal. They believed that Israel would be rescued lock, stock and barrel; God's kingdom would explode onto the world stage in a blaze of glory. NT WRIGHT

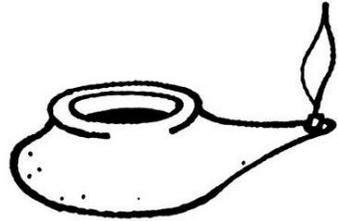
- (e) How does Jesus' parable offer a different vision of Israel and its future?

NB J. Marcus points out that each of the 'failures' is lost at a different stage of growth. The first batch of seed does not even germinate; the second withers away as soon as it springs up; the third apparently grew, but produced nothing (lit. 'did not give fruit'). HOOKER

- (e) Might this awareness of the different stages of failure imply that we must never forget to be attentive to the Word?

Read Mark 4: 21 - 34

3. (a) Why do you think the picture of the lamp and its proper use interrupts the parables that deal with "Seeds"?



What point does it make?

Why is that relevant here?

- (b) How do you understand vv. 24-25? Does it sound unfair?
How do verses 21-25 help explain 11-12?

NB The traditional translation of v.25 has inspired all sorts of reflections, including a whole Shakespeare play (*Measure for Measure*) about the meaning of justice. Here Jesus seems to be telling his followers that the level to which they pay attention to what he's teaching them will be the level at which they receive the benefits of the kingdom. WRIGHT

- (c) How might we make sure that we do not miss the point of Jesus teaching?

- (d) How does the "parable of the growing seed" (vv.26-29) make its point?

What's the significance of the farmer sowing and knowing how it grows in relation to the coming of God's kingdom?

- (e) How does the "parable of the mustard seed" (vv.30-33) make its point?



What aspect of God's kingdom does the mustard seed parable emphasise?



NB Other OT echoes come at the end of the story: the birds of the air make their nest in its shade. Ezekiel and Daniel both use this as an image of a great kingdom growing like a tree until those around it can shelter under it.

(Ezekiel 17:23; 31:6; Daniel 4:12, 21) .

NT WRIGHT