

## A Seed Alone – Mark 4:26-29

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### A Parable among Parables

There is a group of agricultural parables used in Mark chapter 4, which help to explain the presence, reign or milieu of God. The whole chapter is dominated by farming or agricultural images with no fewer than three parables about seeds – their sowing and their growing. These parables contain many Aramaisms, which could suggest that they are close to the actual words of Jesus as Aramaic was his mother tongue. Thus it is obvious to note that the parables of Jesus were originally spoken by him in Aramaic. Our English translations of Jesus' words are from Greek as the gospels were written in Greek. So it is important to

know and remember that the words of Jesus have been through two translations when we read them or hear them in English. It is also very useful to be aware of the emphasis in this group of parables on listening, perceiving, seeing, hearing, understanding and knowing. Qualities that are helpful in understanding the Scriptures and life.

### The Reign of God Happens

These verses (26-29) in chapter 4 are unique to the Gospel of Mark, the first Gospel. The writers of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke who use so much of Mark's Gospel do not use this rather beautiful parable about the reign of God. The message is clear and simple - the reign of God happens – how? We do not know (verse 27). But what exactly do we mean by the reign of God? For Jesus this concept was important. He certainly spoke about it often and it would seem to mean that God is with us here and now. But the reign of God is not a bullying, totalitarian regime telling us what to do and controlling our lives. No, it seems to be freer than that. Parables often say more about God than we notice. So what does this short parable tell us about our God who allows the reign of God to happen so easily in our lives? It speaks of God as a god who is free and enables us to be free also. Nothing is forced upon us. There are no control freaks here. A tiny seed is sown and from just such an insignificant beginning something so great as the reign of God happens – night and day, while we sleep, when we are awake, the seed is sprouting and growing (verse 27).

### Concluding Reflection

These deceptively simple, comparative images and metaphors like "good soil" are rich and deep - and faith seems to be a key theme in all of them. The farmer "throws seed on the land" 4:27 and (*automate*-Greek-automatically) "of itself" it grows. The emphasis is on God's hidden and gradual action in bringing about the reign of God in our world. This short but very profound parable in Mark is unique to the author of this Gospel. Despite its apparent mystic beauty it was not used by the other synoptics. It is basically about faith in the reign of God. Faith that continues to believe in the action of God in our lives even and especially when we are unaware or feeling that nothing is happening for us spiritually. Thus the presence of God with us is inevitable there is no need for discouragement or impatience. We must be like the farmer believing when we cannot see the seed growing and wait for the growth to happen unseen. God's work in us and in our world may seem to have little effect at the moment but this unique Markan parable reminds us that the impossible is possible. The author is writing for his suffering community who are being persecuted for their beliefs. The parable is meant to encourage them and us to persevere and to continue to believe in the power of goodness and God both within us and around us.