

POSSIBILITY PARABLES: God's Underground Growth Plan

March 27, 2022

Overarching Theme: 2022 – *The Year of the Lord's Favor* (Luke 4:19)

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

As the world begins awakening from 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming "the year of the Lord's favor" is a message whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the 'year of jubilee' of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can envision new *possibilities* with God this Lenten season and always.

Reflect on this Scripture: Mark 4:26-29

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."

This Week: Mark 4:26-29

What accounts for the amazing transformation of mere seeds, buried in the ground, into an abundant harvest? Jesus faced this enigma of growth with brimming gratitude to God who "made every tree to grow." He confessed our human ignorance: man "*does not know how*" a seed fructifies. Then He declared that the kingdom of God has the spontaneity of a seed. It possesses a divine vitality, the inherent forces of a God-fashioning life.

A harvest field demands two seasons of human toil – the times of planting and reaping. After the planting, the farmer can do little until the harvest, except pursue other tasks in patience and trust. He must be content to "*sleep and rise, night and day.*" "It is good that a man should hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Meanwhile inscrutable energies are loosed beneath the ground. Soon the tender blade appears, then the ear rich in promise and finally the grain driven by the wind into the waves of a golden sea. Gladly the farmer

"thrusts in the sickle." How have a few handfuls of seed filled his barns with food? "He does not know how." He is baffled and blessed by the mystery of life –spontaneous, self-ordering, self-developing. Such a mystery is the kingdom of God.

The kingdom is a *vital force*. It thrives not primarily by human aid, but by inherent power. A man may dissect the roots of a flower, and analyze the soil, but the secret of growth will still elude him. "God gives the increase."

This intrinsic divinity in life is no encouragement to sloth, but it rebukes a feverish trust in human agency. Instead, it is an encouragement to combine faithful action and hope: "Work out your own salvation ... for it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13).

Again, the kingdom of God moves through *orderly development* to a resistless harvest. The seed appears to have a precarious existence. Buried in the earth, who knows that it will ever survive? Then is seen the miracle of the first shoot piercing its way through the hindering soil; then the ear; then the full grain! Quietly and without haste the moral and spiritual powers resident in human life unfold. The tender green of spring, the pledge of the summer's ripening wheat, the reapers' song, and the bursting granaries are all stored within the seed. Unhurried but sure, the hidden vitality evolves through its full cycle of development.

-Adapted from "The Parables of Jesus" by George Buttrick, pp 17-19.

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Why does God so often work through a process, rather than instantaneously? Is the concept of time, so important to us, as relevant for an eternal God?
2. In the parable, much takes place underground, under the radar of human awareness ("*he does not know how*"). Is our unawareness due to our lack of perception, or is it part of God's purpose, or perhaps a little of both?
3. Can you remember a season of life when God's time table was different than your time table? What did you learn from this experience?
4. What do you think God might be doing 'underground' during these seasons of waiting? Consider personal and/or more global implications of this *vital force*.
5. What kind of seeds are you sowing these days, and what kind of vital harvest are you looking for even as you "*sleep and rise, night and day*"?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC
2. Prayerfully reflect about what you will do with your **Lenten Seed Gift** during this season.
3. The March Mission of the Month is **Ukraine Refugee Relief** through the United Methodist Committee on Relief. To give, go to fumccoppell.org and click on the 'Give' tab at the upper right corner. Scroll down to give online.
4. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Mark 4: 26-27 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.*