

and a time for everything under heaven.

Jesus reminds us that this crop that is mentioned and its journey from seed to harvest is a season and each step takes its proper time. We don't understand everything, we can't control everything and we can't hurry everything. God is working underground even in our moments of waiting.

I want to close by giving you some great advice I read this week from Debra Fileta. She writes in an article in Relevant Magazine that there are five things we can do while we wait on God.

#### **Remember What God Has Done in the Past**

*As my life has unfolded, I see that God's hand has been in every single step, and that His plans were so much better than I even expected. Now, while I wait, I'm learning to deepen my trust in Him, and to remind myself of His faithfulness.*

#### **Deepen Your Prayer Life**

*I want the waiting to bring me closer to Him, rather than fill me with bitterness and resentment. And it's my choice which route I will take.*

*Why worry when you can pray? We've all heard that one before. But how true is that? Why over-analyze my future, when I have the opportunity to impact my future by calling on the supernatural, most-high God?*

#### **Deal With Your Baggage**

*I think the period of waiting can be a huge time of healing and growth. I want to ask God to reveal to me the areas of my life that need work and prepare me for what's to come. I don't want to waste this time anymore.*

#### **Dream Big**

*I am my own worst enemy when it comes to God working in my life, because I am the only one that limits myself. I don't always believe I can do it, or that God can do it through me. I don't always dream big or expect great things.*

*But I want to see this time of waiting as a time to ask God to take me where He wants me to go—and to believe for big things that I know I can't accomplish on my own.*

#### **Spend Time in Worship**

*This is the part where I have the most regrets. I often worship God when He "blesses" me—failing to realize that He is deserving of my worship no matter what is going on in my life.*

*We often treat our life with God like a football game, cheering for God when we score or when good things happen. But life isn't about waiting for the victory—for the marriage, for the job, for the success, for the family—it's about realizing that over every moment in our lives, He is already victorious.*

(Five Things You Can Do While You Wait On God-Debra Fileta. Relevant Magazine, June 5, 2015)

Jesus reminds us with a simple parable that there are going to be moments when we don't understand, when we feel out of control and when time seems to not be on our side. In those moments we take courage that God is at work. If you are waiting on God right now I urge you to consider what God is doing. What is going on underground?



# What is Happening Underground?

Mark 4: 26-29



It was St. John of the Cross, who wrote the poem "Dark Night of the Soul." This poem is about one's soul's journey to union with God. The concept of the poem is that God uses the hardships and trials and even God's moments of silence to purge us and illumine us to a deeper faith in God. We all know of these moments in life. The Bible is filled with such moments. The great men and women of faith have seemingly all known these dark moments. Those moments when it seemed they were alone and God's very presence seemed either far away or non-existent.

Throughout the Old Testament there is over and over again a cry for God to reveal God's self. There are cries for deliverance for nations and for individuals. One of the common cries of the Old Testament is "How Long o Lord?" That is the cry of darkness and despair.

In the New Testament we find similar thoughts of God's silence and seemingly inactivity. Whether it is Paul's impatience of being in prison or Peter's explanation of the delayed second coming, there is a question of God's activity. The most glaring moment like this in the New Testament is of course the cross and death of Jesus. On the cross Jesus would cry out "why have you forsaken me." That prayer of forsakenness and the death of God's one and only Son is the great moment of God's silence. Yet, on this side of resurrection we know that the moment when God seemed absent and silent was the very moment God was doing the most glorious act God had ever done. In the moment when God seemed to abandon this sin filled world, God was actually redeeming this sin filled world.

We describe these moments of darkness or silence in different terms. We might describe them as a lost feeling. I just don't feel God is with me or I just don't feel God like I use too. We might describe those moments in frustration. I just don't think God is hearing my

prayer. It seems my prayer hits the ceiling and goes nowhere. We might describe it as a sense of misunderstanding. I just don't understand what God is doing. We might describe these moments as a crisis of faith. I don't know if God cares for me.

We have these moments when we find ourselves waiting on God and wondering what is God doing? It might be in a time when we are waiting for things to change in our lives or the life of one we love. When we think about it... waiting is most of life.

When we go to the Doctor of course it is a series of waiting moments. We go and wait in the waiting room. Then we go and we wait in our exam room. The nurse comes in and does a few things and then says the Doctor will be in soon and we wait. Then the Doctor sees us and then says lets run a test so we wait. Then the technician comes in and takes our blood and leaves and we wait. Then the Doctor returns and tells us our diagnosis and exits and we wait. Then the nurse returns to give us instructions and sends us to the check out desk and we wait our turn. Then we leave the office and we wonder has anything changed and now I wait to see if healing can come. All the while we wonder what is happening while I am waiting in that little room.

Life can seem like one long wait. We wait for a feeling to subside. We wait for a return interview and that magical moment of "you've got the job." We wait to meet that someone special and marry. We wait for the time when we will feel close to our spouse again. We wait for the Doctor to confirm a long awaited pregnancy. We wait for a time of healing. We wait with others as they go through struggles. We wait and while we wait we wonder to ourselves, what is God doing.

Jesus tells a parable in Mark 4 that is a short parable and it is in a series of parables about the Kingdom of God. Mark tells us that Jesus spoke

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in parables. In fact, Mark says that verse 34 “He did not say anything to them without using a parable.” Mark was speaking about those who were coming to hear Jesus, as He would travel from town to town. We are also told that Jesus explained everything to His disciples as they gathered with Him. In other words, Jesus used various teaching methods. He used stories or parables as making His point and He also spent time explaining these stories to those who were willing to follow and listen.

In the parable we read today, regarding the Kingdom of God, Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like a man who scattered seed on the ground. Night and day whether he sleeps or gets up the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain. First the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it because the harvest has come.

This is a simple parable about the Kingdom of God, but it has incredible implications for us. What is meant by the Kingdom of God? I believe the Bible teaches us that the Kingdom of God is now and not yet. I believe that the Kingdom of God is the reign of God. God’s kingdom exists in heaven that is the kingdom of God is presently a reality. In addition, I believe that the kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God in the lives of those who follow Jesus. Thus, in the coming of Jesus the kingdom of God burst into the world and even now is present in the lives of those who follow Jesus and are co-laboring with God in this world. I think we catch glimpses of the kingdom of God in this world when we see lives changed and situations changed and God is glorified. However, I also believe in a time when Christ will return and the kingdom of God will be complete and full. Thus we pray for the time when God’s kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

This parable is about God’s kingdom and God’s kingdom coming in its fullness. That is the message of the parable. The message is that even if we do not fully understand why or how or when, the kingdom of God will come to fruition completely and fully. The message of the parable in the simplest form is to encourage the follower of Jesus that God’s kingdom is coming and it will not be ultimately hindered or stopped.

However, when I read this passage I kept coming back to the words of Jesus when He said, “Night or Day whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows though he does not know how.” When I read this the thought I had was what is happening underground.

We all remember getting that Styrofoam cup for our science project. We were to fill this cup with dirt or soil

and then place the seeds we had received in the cup of dirt and water it and watch what happened. Now I am sure with all of the N.C. State graduates we have in our church and those who are gardeners and those who grew up on farms can give us the scientific process by which the seed in the dirt goes through the process to begin its growth into a stalk and finally yields a crop. However, science is not Jesus’ point. Jesus’ point is observation. So, just as a child might watch that cup of dirt everyday hoping to see some type of activity, so the sower who planted the seed waits for the crop to come. It takes some time, it takes patience but here is what we know, we know that while we are waiting and observing nothing, something amazing is happening under the dirt. God is at work underground. We don’t know why and further more the process is not due to our work and effort. God is at work and God will work a process in our lives that leads to a fruitful ending. That is the message of the parable.

What I want to suggest to you today is the hope that comes from this parable. Here is that word of hope. When we are passing through the darkest nights, and hardest moments or even just the moments of boredom and sameness of life... God is at work underground and we might not understand it and we might not see the evidence of it... God is at work.

Let me suggest a few thoughts from this parable. This parable reminds us that we don’t have to understand everything to have faith. Our obsession with understanding can sometimes blind us from what God is doing. Jesus reminds us that the seed is growing even though the sower does not know how. The mystery of the kingdom of God and God’s work is sometimes not for us to know. Maybe one of the hardest things for you and me with the minds of a western civilization culture is to accept that there is some things in life we might have to be comfortable not truly understanding. I don’t have to understand that the solar system to observe the glory of a sunset. I don’t have to understand the tides to be soothed at the sound of a crashing wave. I don’t have to understand how a seed grows to enjoy the beauty of a meadow of flowers. I don’t have to always understand to know the beauty of God’s work.

The scientific process is so much a part of our thinking and culture that it is almost impossible for us to escape it. We believe that everything we experience and observe must be broken down and understood. That is true of nature, creation, people and events. We must understand. We believe that if we can just break it down in its smallest form, then we can understand the parts and thus understand the whole.

We even do that with scripture. I was taught to take a

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Bible verse and break it down. Break down the Greek words and parse the verbs and know the structure of the sentence, then put it all back together so I might truly understand it. Well I do this all the time and it is helpful in giving insight into a verse of scripture, but then there are sometimes when my soul aches for a word from God not a verb. There is a time when I long for God’s presence that comes mysteriously through the reading of these well-worn pages. There are those moments when that one verse jumps off the page and the Holy Spirit stirs in, my heart stops and I read it again. Stop and listen. Sometimes I don’t need to understand it all, I just need to stop and let the Word of God wash over me and through me.

Jesus reminds us that the kingdom of God is happening, even when we don’t fully understand. We can know that God is working underground, even when we don’t understand how.

Jesus speaks to our obsession with control. When we are honest with ourselves we must admit we like being in control. The thought of not being able to control others, circumstances and events cause us great anxiety. There is much angst in our culture today because it feels that things, life, or events are out of control. Living now post 9-11 we face the thought of not being able to control the chaos in our world. We stand in line and take off our shoes and almost undress before we board a plane. We put every app we can think of to protect our security on our computers. We jockey and position ourselves at work so we can have some control over decisions being made. In our marriages we seek to control the other as we do with most of our relationships.

We do the same with God. Somehow we have arrived at a place in Christianity in America that God is ours to manipulate and control. If I do this or have say in this or if I believe that, then I somehow force God to act according to my needs and wants. How incredibly arrogant and self centered we have become to believe that the God of all creation is in any way controlled by us. Let me state this plainly... all that we are, all that we have, all we will ever be and all we will ever experience is not the result of our holiness, godliness or our making. We are the joyful and grateful recipients of a loving and benevolent God. We do not control God or God’s actions.

Jesus reminds us in the parable that the sower is

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participating. The sower does sow the seed and the sower we assume does sickle the harvest. Yes, the sower is involved but it is not the sower who is in charge. In fact, whether sleeping or getting up God is brining the harvest. God is in control.

One side note and that is simply I know that there is a growing sentiment in our world that somehow the world is out of control. The constant news of threats, war and rumors of war make us believe that God is not acting and God does not care. How will this world end up, we ask?

Jesus’ answer... the kingdom of God is coming. Whether it is evident at this moment or not, does not change the promise of God. God is in control.

Jesus also reminds us that timing is not ours to choose. I am reminded in this parable of the patience that is required of a farmer or a gardener. I am reminded of the time period that is described here in this parable. There is the seed that produces the stalk that produces the head that produces the kernel in the head that then is harvested. Each of those steps is seasons of growth. Each one can take a different amount of time and

beyond that every plant, even of the same type, can take a different amount of time to come to harvest. Here is the reminder. Life takes time. There is as the preacher of Ecclesiastes who says a time for everything and a season for everything under heaven.

When I was growing up sports had seasons. You played football in the fall. You had a break and you played basketball in the winter. You had a break and you played baseball in the spring and summer and then you had a break and you started over. Now of course some kids are asked to play the same sport all year long. Whether it is hockey or soccer or tennis, golf, or even those three main sports a child at a young age it seems is asked to pick a sport and play it year round. Here we are in June watching the National Basketball League Finals and the National Hockey League Finals. We will be watching the World Series in November. Something has gone wrong with the concept of seasons.

The same is true with more serious matters. We get stuck into thinking that every moment is going to last forever. The truth we learn not only from God’s word, but just simple observation or the study of history is that everything has seasons. People have seasons, marriages have seasons, kingdoms have seasons, nations have seasons, and churches have seasons. There is a season