



Introduction:

Harvest for the Hungry is a life-line for many in desperate need. Thousands of families in eastern Europe face hunger every day. Over many years, the Christian charity "TEN" has provided food parcels which have become an essential source of basic food for many. Your gift to Harvest for the Hungry will enable our partner churches in Eastern Europe to help needy families and the elderly to survive the cold months of winter.

Group Study and Discussion

Read: Mark 4 26 – 29 The Parable of the Growing Seed

"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters 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."

We are familiar with the frequent use of parables by Jesus to explain aspects of the Kingdom of God. Parables are not allegories and are structured to bring out a single truth rather than a set of divine facts. The beauty of the parable is that it becomes instantly memorable. However, the problem with the parable is that the meaning is hidden and requires explanation. In Mark chapter 4 we have no less than three parables that use the imagery of seeds. We are told in verse 34 that when alone with his disciples, Jesus explained the meaning of each parable. Don't you wish you were there to hear it for yourself?

The parable of 'the growing seed' is found only in Mark's Gospel and is one of the lesser known. It's a bit of a riddle. Can you work it out?

READ THE TEXT AGAIN

"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters 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."

What are your initial thoughts? What sticks out for you? Is there anything unexpected?
Jesus was hardly giving a lecture on crop cultivation, so what point was He making?

LET'S PRAY TO GOD AND ASK FOR HIS HELP TO UNDERSTAND (Two or three to pray)

One phrase seems to stand out in contrast to the rest of the parable. *'The seed sprouts and grows, **though he does not know how.***'

We remind ourselves that the parable aims to reveal a single aspect of the Kingdom of God. Could it be about our ignorance? We do not yet fully comprehend the reality of God's reign. Our intellectual grasp is incomplete. Dare we admit that often we do not know how God's kingdom works?

Is there always a mystery about God's kingdom? Do God's ways both surprise us and puzzle us? Do we sometimes feel that our prayers are not being answered and become discouraged?

The famous words of 18th century poet William Cowper are still often quoted "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform..."

What divine mysteries do we face?

Do we ask questions of God? Why? When? Who?

PAUSE FOR QUIET REFLECTION

The Apostle Paul wrote "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow." (1 Corinthians 3:6). Paul saw that although Apollos and himself had a vital part to play in establishing God's kingdom, it was God Himself who brought about the growth.

How can we serve God in a practical way by sowing seeds and watering young plants?

Does God give us tasks to fulfil? Careers to develop, friendships to grow and neighbourhoods to serve?

SHARE A PERSONAL STORY ABOUT SOMEONE WHO PLANTED A SEED THAT BECAME FRUITFUL

In our parable there was a period of time that elapsed between the scattering of the seed and the harvesting of the crop. It was necessary to wait for the cereal crop to ripen. Who could predict the day of harvest?

When do we see the end results?

Having planted the seed, we work through the day and sleep each night month by month. There are signs of life, but no hint of harvest, yet.

DID GOD ANSWER A PRAYER MADE A LONG TIME AGO

PRAYER:

WE THANK YOU LORD FOR THE MYSTERIES OF YOUR KINGDOM, FOR THE WAY THAT YOU ANSWER OUR PRAYERS AND CAUSE ALL THINGS TO WORK FOR YOUR GLORY AND FOR OUR GOOD. AMEN