

**June 14      We Really Don't Know!      Mark 4:26-34**

Children and teens have an astute, even natural inclination toward not knowing. They are the most curious creatures on the planet, soaking up new information like a sponge. Yet if you ask them important questions, it's amazing what they don't know.

I heard a crash in the kitchen and went in to find that four year old Aaron had climbed up on the counter. There was a broken plate on the floor and he was frozen like a deer in the headlights. *What happened, Buddy*, I asked? *I don't know*, he said. *Well who knows what happened? I don't know.*

If you ask when, why or how, you get the famous answer. *Why did you get a C in Algebra? I don't know. Let me put it another way, did you know you were making Cs in algebra? Yes. Did you ask the teacher for some help? Yes. What happened? I don't know.*

Eventually, however, we all become addicted to knowing. Start with some education, throw in some pride, add a good dose of disdain for being ignorant, and you have a potent cocktail of confidence. No need to be unsure about anything ever again.

Humans need to know or at least think they know. And when we don't know, we can do crazy things to compensate. When financial institutions started to collapse last year, no one in government or in the private sector knew how deep or extensive the problem was. But not knowing what was wrong or how to fix it was not an option. So leaders called for and implemented drastic measures. That's what we do when we don't know. And all of us are wondering if the cure is going to be worse than the disease.

Ignorance is bliss unless we know that we don't know. Mountains of evidence indicate that the standard human response to not knowing what we need to know is anxiety and over-compensation. When waiting for answers might be more reasonable, we often knee-jerk.

We incarcerated Japanese-Americans after Pearl Harbor. Why? Because we didn't know about their real allegiance. We could not accept not knowing, so in our fear, we constructed a different reality on the ground; we tucked them away and violated the very freedoms we sought to protect.

We have the same issue with enemy combatants today. In many cases, we don't know their involvement with terror groups, so we hold them indefinitely. Or we don't know where our enemies are hiding or what they are planning, so we use torture to get this information. It comes from the fear of not knowing something we need to know.

And what does this have to do with our text today? Let's look at **Mark 4**. Jesus was creating a metaphor about the Kingdom of God. The kingdom requires a parable because like God it cannot be seen in the way we see other kingdoms.

Jesus often used agricultural images to teach his people about the kingdom. The kingdom is *like someone who scatters seed on the ground*. After scattering, the sower waits. The seed will eventually sprout and grow (v. 27)... and *the sower doesn't know how*.

Now that's odd. You would think that someone who farmed would understand all about farming. But the sower is ignorant about the most significant transformation taking place in his field. He doesn't know how because he doesn't make it grow.

The sower knows to scatter the seed on the soil. The sower knows to wait for the plants to grow to full grain. The sower knows to harvest the grain and how to turn that grain into food. But the sower does not know how seed turns to plant and grain. He knows it happens, but he doesn't have a clue how. If someone came by and asked, *how does that seed grow a harvest*, the sower would sound like your child: *I don't know*.

In the absence of knowledge, he sows and waits. He doesn't do a soil analysis. He doesn't plow or create furrows. He doesn't build expensive machines to put the seeds in the ground. He doesn't build intricate irrigations systems in case it doesn't rain. He doesn't buy crop insurance. He just scatters the seeds and then marvels that it grows.

The Kingdom of God is like this. The Spirit works beyond our vision and knowledge. We can see some outward evidence of the kingdom to be sure, but the true miracle and mystery of how the kingdom of God begins to grow is beyond us.

Does God intervene with each seed, causing it to germinate? *I don't know*. Has God created a biological system that triggers natural functions? Our text implies this. Look at **v. 28: *the earth produces of itself***. It sure seems that God made the earth in such a way that seed in soil causes germination. It's therefore not a miracle in the sense of God causing something to happen out of the ordinary. The earth produces in response to human initiative and so does the kingdom.

**The kingdom is responsive to our initiative, but not our control!** The kingdom produces of itself. We don't know how the kingdom grows; we're just called to sow. Citizens of the kingdom do not produce the kingdom.

An abortion doctor was murdered recently, highlighting our ongoing social battle over when life begins. One thing we have in abundance on both sides of this fight is supreme confidence in what is known. One side is supremely confident that conception happens by the hand of God and therefore a fertilized egg is not only human, but a divine act of God. The other side knows beyond doubt that conception is a biological process; that a fetus cannot grow to become a viable baby without the mother's body, and therefore any decision about that fetus is a decision to be made by the one whose body is an indispensable part of the equation.

Jesus says we don't know how things happen in the earth or in the kingdom and yet everyone is certain about the beginnings of human life. No, the heat of this debate is just another example of how dogmatism rises in the absence of knowing.

We are citizens of the kingdom, but not engineers of the kingdom in the way that nuclear reactors need engineers. We are not kingdom bureaucrats in the way that large organizations need managers. We are not kingdom politicians because the kingdom of God doesn't need people who play with power.

**No, we are to the kingdom of God what farmers are to agrarian societies.** We sow seed and trust God to bring about a harvest. We sow and get out of the way until harvest time.

Early Christians were called "people of the way" because Jesus described himself as "the way the truth and the life." Yet I wonder if we have become **people IN the way**; in the way of the kingdom. People who can't stand aside for the kingdom to produce, but instead, dig up the seed every day to check on its progress. It does not seem that we are willing to live in the mystery of God's work and ways. It seems that we need to micromanage the gospel so that it works the way we want it to work. To be people of the way, we need to get out of the way.

Kristen and I went down to SC to participate with the building team. It's hard to imagine how anything can be done in that heat and humidity. I hope we can find a church in the mountains next year.

This building team composed of regular and faithful members of several congregations show up at the appointed time and place to build a facility for a congregation. Every nail and board is a seed sown. This group knows that they build and then get out of the way so the host church can do their work. This group knows the difference between what they do and what God

must do. They make buildings but only God can make a church. This is another parable of the kingdom.

Our community ministry leadership team is pulling together a resource guide for SS classes. The resource guide will be helping organizations in our community who need volunteers. It is our prayer that every SS class in our church will take on as many mission projects as they are able. Each class will choose their own initiatives that fit the gifts of the class. Some are already doing this well.

Our Upward program is a seed sowing initiative. Only God can create spiritual growth from it. Our VBS, sports camp and choir camp are seed sowing initiatives. This is the work we do and the kingdom grows beyond our sight and knowledge.

Every meal we prepare for the hungry is seed sown; every kind word that we speak to the sick is sowing; every disadvantaged child that we tutor is sowing; every dollar that we give is sowing. We have no idea how the kingdom is a work in our service, nor do we need to know. God knows because it's God's kingdom.

We have good seed and many hands to sow. Let's not be distracted by our own agendas or concerns. Let's sow the seeds of the gospel as Jesus taught us and then get out of the way. And let's be faithful to harvest when that time comes.

Seeds can lie dormant for years before growing;  
Sow seeds anyway  
Some seed is snatched away by birds and never grows;  
Sow seeds anyway  
Some seed sprouts but never bears fruit;  
Sow seeds anyway  
Some plants get choked out by weeds;  
Sow seeds anyway  
Some seeds produce a great harvest for the kingdom;  
This is why we sow... even when we do not know.