

## **Thoughts for Harvest Festival: 1: Prayer is team-work with God**

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**Reading:** Mark 4:26-29. The parable of the growing seed

This must be the simplest of Jesus' parables.

Mark's gospel was the first book to be written about Jesus, writing down what the disciples remembered about all that Jesus said and did. Then Matthew and Luke read Mark and copied most of Mark and added their own stuff. Funny thing, they left this parable out. My guess is, they thought it was so simple that they thought why bother including it. So it's just as well that we still have Mark's gospel as well as the others in our Bible so we can keep so many wonderful little stories that Jesus told. This parable is so simple. Nothing happens except the plant grows. That's it.

A farmer plants seed. Days pass, he gets up in the morning and goes to bed at night, and all by itself the seed sprouts and grows. And then when the grain is ripe he picks it. That's it.

I love that Jesus told such obvious, simple stories – it's hardly a story at all, it's just what happens all the time. A seed goes into the ground, it grows into a plant, and hopefully you get to eat the fruit.

So what did Jesus mean when he said that the kingdom of God is like this?

When the Bible talks about a harvest, normally this is what it means – picking the fruit or gathering in the grain is normally a symbol for a positive change in human community. So the Bible talks about a harvest of righteousness. In the Psalm we just read the harvest is a symbol for joy and celebration, of God meeting the needs of his people, of God's blessing, abundance and care.

This is what we celebrate this harvest thanksgiving service – not just the fruit we pick of beans and grapes, but the fruit that grows in our lives, the relationships that sustain us with love, the power and grace that give our lives meaning and energy and purpose. This is God's harvest, the fruit of the Spirit.

So when Jesus says that the harvest comes after growth happens even while the farmer is asleep, even while the farmer is not doing anything for the plant ... what does this mean?

I'd say, it is great news because what God is doing in the world is not totally dependent on our effort. That is great news! It's not all about me, or you, or our church programmes. God is getting on with his work even while we're asleep. Excellent.

But the farmer is still important. The farmer still has to plant the seed, and then harvest the fruit. He doesn't totally understand how the plant grows but it's a team effort, I reckon, between him and God.

I think that prayer is like that.

This Lent we are spending more time praying and taking time to be with God. We don't totally understand who God is or what God is doing, but it is a team effort.

When we pray we make it easier for God to do what God is doing. When we pray

we push through rocks and obstructions and release God's spirit. When we pray we do our part and God meets us and gets to work.

**Reading:** John 12:23-26

**Thought 2: Jesus died so that we might live**

I said just before that the most important prayer is a Thank you prayer.

Now I want to change my mind. Am I allowed to change my mind?

now I want to argue that the most important prayer is the prayer of a seed in the ground, the prayer of surrender.

Jesus said that a seed has to let go, surrender, stop being a seed, which is kind of dying, in order to a new plant to grow.

Down there in the dark, a seed splits open its safe strong outside shell, and put out a tiny root and a tiny shoot. The seed gives up all the life it has stored inside itself and this gives the plant the energy to make a start on life.

Jesus said that we all have to die to ourselves in order to fully live.

Jesus said that the only way he could bring God's new life into human life was for him to die, to be killed on the cross. And Jesus did this for us. We remember this on Good Friday at Easter time.

The apostle Paul said that we share in the death of Jesus so that we can also share in the resurrection of Jesus.

This is the prayer of surrender, to say to God: you know, I actually cannot do this on my own. I will keep stuffing up and letting people down. No matter how hard I try I cannot be good enough to deserve your love. So, you know what, I'm going to stop trying, and just let you love me anyway.

This is the prayer of the seed, to be opened out from the inside by the Spirit of the living God who can only use us when we let him.

The prayer of surrender sounds like this

– you might like to hold out your hands open and wide.

Let us pray

God, I am yours. I'm nothing much without you. I'm not even going to try running around in circles trying to be good enough for you. Your love is so much bigger than I can grasp. Thank you for your love. Thank you for loving us so much that you would sacrifice everything for us.

Take my life and let it be  
ever, only, all for thee. Amen.