



**Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,**  
**“The Joy of the Kingdom”**

**04 May 2025**

**Readings: Mark 4:1-20; Isaiah 55:10-11, James 1:22-25**

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**Introduction:**

Hearing is a curious and complex gift.

As we begin our three-week journey through the first three parables of (Mark 4), we're invited to consider what it really means to listen, truly listen. Hearing isn't just a matter of sound reaching our ears. There are so many layers to it: background noise, tone, pitch, clarity, and our ability to focus in a crowded world. The same is true when it comes to hearing the message of the Kingdom of God. Jesus often said, *“Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.”* It wasn't just about physical hearing; it was about spiritual readiness.

I am often reminded that faith comes by hearing—both spiritually and, in one remarkable case, quite literally.

Many of you may know Dr. Graeme Clark, now approaching 90, a man of deep Christian faith and humble service, and a regular visitor to KAC, including this past Easter. He is best known as the inventor of the Cochlear implant, a life-changing device that enables the deaf to hear. Graeme's story is one of listening to God's call. In the 1960s, while walking along the Minnamurra River, he picked up a seashell. In that moment, inspiration struck. He saw in that shell, a model of how God's creation might be harnessed to help people hear again.

It was a moment of inspiration, but also of faith. Graeme is always quick to say that it was God's wisdom, not his own, that opened the way. His life and work are a testimony to the power of hearing—not just with our ears, but with our hearts. In (Mark 4), through the parable of the Sower, we see how people respond differently to the same message depending on the condition of their hearts.

Some couldn't hear at all. Others heard only part of the truth. And still others heard with clarity and responded with joy. The same Spirit who moved then is the one tuning our ears today, helping us to discern the joy, truth, and life that Jesus offers in His Kingdom.

So, as we look at this passage, let's pray for ears that hear, hearts that receive, and lives that bear fruit.

Because the joy of the Kingdom is not just in hearing—it's in understanding and responding.

**Let us pray:**

Gracious God,

Open our hearts today. Tune our desire to hear Your voice clearly, even amidst the noise of our lives. Soften the soil of our hearts, that Your Word might take root deeply, grow strongly, and bear fruit abundantly. Help us not to be hearers only, but doers of Your Word, responding with faith, obedience, and joy to all that You are revealing. Through Your Spirit, make us attentive, humble, and ready.

We pray this in the name of Jesus, the Living Word

Amen.

Today I'm going to suggest that this parable, far from being a farming lesson, is also a retelling of Israel's story, a story of division, a story of invitation, and ultimately, a story of the joy of the Kingdom.

### **A Story of Division:**

For generations, the people of Israel had understood themselves as God's chosen ones. They were the descendants of Abraham, the recipients of the Law and the people of the covenant. But now, Jesus was drawing a new line, not one of birthright, but one of hearing and responding. This moment echoes Isaiah's own calling. When Isaiah stood in the throne room of YHWH, he was given a mission: to speak to a people whose hearts had grown dull, whose ears were heavy, and whose eyes were closed.

#### **Let me read you (Isaiah 6:9-10):**

*"He said, "Go and tell this people:*

*"Be ever hearing, but never understanding;  
be ever seeing, but never perceiving.'*

*Make the heart of this people calloused;*

*make their ears dull and close their eyes  
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
hear with their ears,  
understand with their hearts,  
and turn and be healed."*

His words would not immediately bring change, but would reveal who was truly listening. In the same way, Jesus' parables divided the crowd. Some would hear and understand, while others would hear and turn away.

This division was not about exclusion.

It was about response.

The Kingdom of God was being proclaimed, and the question was simple: Who would receive it? Who would have ears to hear?

### **A Retelling of Israel's History:**

Throughout history, YHWH sent prophets to call Israel back to Him. *YHWH* is the sacred and personal name of God, revealed to Moses at the burning bush in (Exodus 3:14) when God declared, **"I AM WHO I AM."**

This name speaks of God's eternal, unchanging nature, He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Though ancient Israelites considered this name too holy to speak aloud, it reminds us that God is ever-present, faithful, and intimately involved in the lives of His people. Again and again, YHWH spoke through Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others, offering His people a way of life that led to flourishing.

Sometimes, the message took root. Often, it was rejected.

And now, in the fullness of time, God sent not just another prophet but His own Son. Through Jesus, we see the fullness of *YHWH's* love, as He is *Emmanuel, God with us*, calling us into a restored relationship with Him. Yet just as in the days of the prophets, not everyone received this message in the same way.

Some had hardened their hearts, like the seed that fell on the path, unable to grasp the truth. Some had received the message with joy, but when trials came, they withered, like the seed on rocky ground. Others had been distracted by wealth, worries, and the cares of the world, like the seed choked by thorns.

But there were also those who received the message, nurtured it, and bore abundant fruit, the ones who truly heard and understood.

But Jesus' parable was not just a reflection on how people responded. It was also an invitation. This was not a story about destiny. It was a call to open hearts and listen.

The history of Israel was coming to its climax in Jesus. In Him, every prophecy, every longing, and every promise of YHWH was being fulfilled.

The same invitation stands before us today.

**Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.**

### **The Invitation to Align with the Kingdom:**

The parable did not end with judgment but with hope. The seed that fell on good soil bore a harvest beyond expectation; thirty, sixty, even a hundredfold. The Kingdom of God is not about mere survival; it is about thriving. Jesus was not merely calling people to listen. He was calling them to align their lives with the Kingdom, to receive the message and allow it to transform them from within.

This is where joy enters the story. The Kingdom is not a heavy burden but a gift.

It is not something we build by our effort but something we receive.

When we have ears to hear, we find ourselves caught up in a story far greater than our own, a story of renewal, redemption, and divine joy.

### **The Results of This Decision:**

Choosing to hear and respond to Jesus is not merely an intellectual exercise. It transforms everything. Those who embrace the Kingdom, experience a life that is deeply connected to God. Prayer becomes a lifeline, not an obligation. Community becomes a source of strength, not just a social gathering. Transformation happens not just in individual hearts but as we have seen, within our community.

This is God's church, and He is at work. God's church is sustained by His presence. His Spirit is moving within us and amongst us. His Kingdom will always grow. The parable of the Sower in (Mark 4) reminds us that God is continually planting His word in the hearts of His people.

The church is not a static institution but a growing, flourishing space where the seed of the Kingdom takes root and bears fruit. The work of the Spirit is like the unseen power within the soil, nourishing, transforming, and bringing life. When we gather in worship, serve in love, and proclaim the message of Jesus, other people will see the good soil producing a bountiful harvest. The Spirit moves in our conversations, in our prayers, and in the quiet moments of conviction and encouragement.

Will we have ears to hear and eyes to see what He is doing?

**Living in the Kingdom Now:**

The Kingdom of God is not just a future hope; it is a present reality. When Jesus spoke in parables, he was not just talking about an abstract spiritual truth. He was describing a way of life available now. To live in the Kingdom is to walk in step with the King, to allow his words to shape our hearts and actions, to cultivate the soil of our lives so that the seed takes deep root.

To help us walk in step with the King our church has set a Vision.

At this year's AGM I was compelled to share "Romans 12:9-12" to guide our Vision.

Let's apply these verses to our parable today taking us forward together.

Firstly, one of the primary ways we walk in step with the King is through prayer.

(Romans 12: 12) reminds us to: *"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer"*.

Just as the good soil receives the seed and allows it to take root, a prayerful heart is one that remains open to God's voice. When we pray, we are not simply asking for things; we are positioning ourselves to hear, to be shaped, and to respond. Prayer connects us to the living God, who is actively sowing His Word in our lives. It deepens our trust in Him and reminds us that we are not growing the Kingdom in our own strength but through His power and guidance. Secondly, we walk in step with the King by connecting with others. (Romans 12:9-10) exhorts us that:

*"Love must be sincere.*

*Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

*Be devoted to one another in love.*

*Honour one another above yourselves"*.

God moves within His people as a whole. The church is a body, a family, a community where the seeds of faith are nurtured in relationship. Just as a single seed flourishes best in healthy soil, our faith is strengthened when we connect with others who encourage, challenge, and walk alongside us. Gathering in worship, sharing in fellowship, and supporting one another in love are essential to the life of the church. Isolation leads to spiritual dryness, but connection brings growth. When we invest in relationships with one another, we create space for the Spirit to work among us, building a church that is strong, united, and full of life. Thirdly, as our Vision guides us, we walk in step with the King as we are transformed to be more like Jesus.

(Romans 12:11) calls us to:

*"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord"*.

The parable of the Sower does not simply call us to receive the word, it calls us to grow and bear fruit. God's church is meant to be a place of transformation, where we are continually shaped to be more like Jesus. The Spirit is not finished with us; He is refining, teaching, and leading us deeper into the character of Christ. It reminded me of an experience Oscar and I had just the other day, something that helped us reflect on what it means to be transformed by the Spirit of God. We were out the back in our garden when we suddenly heard the loud, constant siren that always warns of an impending rock blast from Cleary Brothers. The siren was deafening, and we braced ourselves.

Then came the explosion, but surprisingly, it was quiet. What struck us most was the powerful reverberation that followed. Though the blast itself was barely audible, its impact was felt deep in our bodies.

It made me think about how the Holy Spirit works. Sometimes the Spirit doesn't arrive with noise or drama, but with a quiet power that reverberates through our lives. The invisible

becomes alive. What we can't always see with our eyes or hear with our ears, we come to recognise in our hearts. That's the work of the Spirit, transforming us from within.

As we surrender to this work, we develop hearts that reflect His love, minds that embrace His truth, and lives that demonstrate His grace. Growth is not always easy, it requires breaking through the hard ground of old habits and allowing God to uproot what holds us back. But as we yield to Him, we become a harvest of righteousness, bearing fruit that blesses others and glorifies God.

**Conclusion: Ears to Hear:**

At the end of the parable, Jesus says, *"Anyone with ears to hear, let them hear!"*

This is not a casual remark; it is an urgent invitation.

The Kingdom is here.

The Sower is scattering seed.

The harvest is plentiful.

The question is simple: Will we hear?

Amen!