



**Sermon Notes: Steve Stanis,
"The Growth of God's Kingdom"**

18 May 2025

Readings: Mark 4:26-29, Ezekiel 17:22-24, 1 Corinthians 3:6-7

Introduction:

Have you heard the well-known expression "music to my ears"? This was our family delight as Oscar grew in his love of music over the years. Oscar, in his musical journey, has taken many music exams. Each one challenged him in different ways: playing an instrument, scales, answering general knowledge questions, and completing an aural test.

One of the most difficult parts of an aural exam is recognising individual notes within a chord. A chord is a combination of three, four, or even five notes played together, creating a harmonious sound. The challenge is not just hearing the harmony but isolating each note and singing it back. This requires deep listening, patience, and trained ears.

In other words, he needs "ears to hear."

In the same way, Jesus' parables function like these chords. At first, we hear the full melody, the broad, surface meaning of the story. But we must pause to listen for the individual notes. We must take the time to discern the deeper layers, the harmonies that reveal the richness of God's truth.

Do we truly have ears to hear?

Let me pray:

Gracious and Sovereign God,

We come before You today with open hearts to hear Your Word and longing to be shaped by it. As we reflect on the mystery of Your Kingdom growing, quietly, steadily, often beyond our understanding, we ask for ears to hear and faith to trust.

Lord, remind us that You are always at work, even when we cannot see it.

Help us to rest in the truth that the seed of Your Word, once planted, will grow in Your timing and by Your power.

We thank You that the growth of Your Kingdom does not depend on our strength, but on Your grace.

In the name of Jesus, our Sower and our Lord,

Amen.

In (Mark 4:26-29): Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a growing seed. At first glance, it seems like another simple farming analogy, planting, growth, and harvest. But when we listen closely, we begin to hear the deeper harmonies. The seed is planted, it grows in ways unseen, and when the time is right, the harvest comes. What seems like an ordinary agricultural cycle, is actually a profound revelation of how God's Kingdom unfolds, often hidden, yet unstoppable. We've seen before that Jesus' ministry did not unfold the way people expected of the Messiah. Instead of leading an uprising against the Roman occupiers and restoring Jewish rule, Jesus moved quietly among the people. He spoke in parables, challenged religious institutions, dined with outcasts, and healed the broken. He did not force change through power, but planted seeds; seeds of faith, of truth, and of love; deep in the hearts of those who could listen. These seeds, though invisible at first, would one day grow into a flourishing Kingdom, transforming lives and spreading far beyond what anyone could imagine. Just as no one can see a seed

germinate beneath the soil, the work of God’s Kingdom often happens in ways we do not immediately perceive. But in time, the evidence of transformation becomes undeniable.

The question is repeated: Do we have ears to hear?

Are we listening for the quiet, steady work of God in our lives and in the world around us?

The Seed and the Resurrection:

Let’s go back to the seed itself. Jesus describes how a man scatters seed upon the ground, and while he sleeps and goes about his daily life, the seed sprouts and grows, *“he knows not how.”* The earth produces crops by itself: first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain. Only when the grain is ripe does the farmer harvest.

There is a quiet miracle happening here. The seed, once buried in the earth, undergoes transformation.

In Jewish thought, the imagery of something being laid in the earth and then rising again was more than just agricultural. It carried the profound weight of resurrection. The Greek word for “get up” or “rise” in this passage is one of the same words used for resurrection in the New Testament. This parable, then, is not just about natural growth. It is about the power of God to bring life. It is about God’s plan to restore, renew, and resurrect His people.

For first-century Jewish listeners, the idea of resurrection was not just personal; it was national.

It was the belief that God would restore Israel’s fortunes, raise the faithful to new life, and establish His promised Kingdom. Jesus’ parable is quietly proclaiming: that time is now.

God’s Kingdom has been planted, and though its growth may be unseen and mysterious, it is inevitable. Just as the seed germinates unseen beneath the soil, so too is God’s Kingdom growing in ways beyond human understanding.

But do we have ears to hear this truth?

Are we listening for the deeper reality beneath the surface?

God’s Kingdom: A New Vision:

Jesus’ question at the beginning of the parable echoes an older, more profound question from the prophet Isaiah: *“To whom will you liken God, or what likeness will you compare with Him?”* (Isaiah 40:18). Isaiah 40 is a declaration of hope, a call to see God anew, as the Creator who is coming to rescue His people, to restore Israel after a time of devastation. Jesus, by using this parable, is inviting His listeners to reimagine God’s Kingdom in a new way. It will not arrive with fanfare, nor will it be established by military might or political power. Instead, it will grow quietly, persistently, like the seed in the ground. It will appear small at first, but in time, it will become a great and unstoppable force. For Jesus’ audience, this was a radical message.

The Kingdom is present, but its full glory will only be revealed in time.

Do we have ears to hear this countercultural message? Are we attuned to the quiet, transformative work of God?

A Shelter for the World:

Another key note in this chord is the final image Jesus gives from (Ezekiel 17:23)

“The birds of the air make their nests in its shade.”

This is no random detail.

In the Jewish Scriptures, particularly in Ezekiel and Daniel, great trees with birds nesting in their branches are used as symbols of mighty kingdoms. This verse also describes how God will plant a tender shoot that will become a great cedar, under which

“birds of every kind will find shelter.”

Similarly, in (Daniel 4), the Babylonian Empire is compared to a vast tree offering shade to the nations. Jesus is drawing on these images to declare something astonishing: God’s Kingdom, though starting as a small seed, will grow into something immense and inclusive. It will be a place of refuge for all peoples.

This is a deeply countercultural message.

The Jewish people often viewed the Kingdom of God as something exclusive to them, but Jesus expands the vision.

The Kingdom is for everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike. It is not just for one nation, but for all who seek refuge in God.

For us today, this image is a powerful call to action. If the Kingdom of God is to be a place of shelter, then we, as followers of Christ, must be its branches. We must extend welcome, offer refuge, and create spaces where people find rest and renewal in the love of God.

But first, we must hear the call.

Do we have ears to hear the call of grace through hospitality, inclusion, of growing into a people who reflect the sheltering love of God and bring others toward the light?

This call becomes especially real when we look just beyond our own doors. As a church, we say our doors are open to all but how deeply do we live that out? This passage is like a mirror held up to us, asking whether our welcome is wide enough, whether our compassion stretches beyond comfort.

If we are to be the branches of God’s Kingdom, then we must extend shelter not just spiritually but practically, seeing in each person, a beloved image-bearer of God.

Hospitality is about proximity, presence, and persistent love.

How are you personally called to be the shade tree of Christ’s love for your neighbours here? Let me remind you of the imagery I used in an earlier sermon. Our table found under the tree must be longer.

I wonder what practical ideas you have. Please share them with our church so that together we can work towards our vision to glorify God, making Jesus known, as we love and serve together.

Living as Kingdom Workers:

We discover in (Acts 2) that God is able to create rapid dynamic growth in His church through His Spirit, but that is not always the case and certainly does not reflect the ongoing experience of the early church. In reality, His kingdom grows slowly, sometimes imperceptibly.

The seeds of His Kingdom are sown into human hearts and it is by His grace and in His timing that the seed will grow. As followers of Jesus, we are also privileged to scatter seeds. We do this by our teaching but more importantly by sharing and demonstrating His love. We may sometimes be disappointed not to see the fruit or even the germination of those seeds.

But just now and then, we may see growth in others (often from seeds which we ourselves did not sow) which will reassure us that seeds do actually grow, and God is indeed building his Kingdom here on earth, as it is in heaven.

Do we take the call seriously to be kingdom-workers; cultivating faith, spreading love, and nurturing growth in others? This task requires faith.

The farmer in the parable does not force the seed to grow. He trusts the natural process. Likewise, we do not bring about God’s Kingdom by our own power. We plant, we nurture, but ultimately, it is God who brings the growth.

This should be both humbling and encouraging. It reminds us that even when we cannot see immediate results, God is at work. When our efforts seem small or insignificant, we can trust that the Kingdom is growing in ways beyond our comprehension. Moreover, we must also be kingdom story tellers.

Just as Jesus’ original listeners were familiar with the imagery He used; we too must learn to articulate the message of the Kingdom in ways that resonate with those around us. The world needs fresh chords, new ways of hearing and understanding God’s truth. Our lives should be songs that invite others to listen, to discern the individual notes, and ultimately to join in the melody of God’s redemption.

But first, we must be attuned to the song ourselves. We must have ears to hear the harmonies of God’s work in the world.

Conclusion:

(Mark 4:26-29) is more than a simple parable about seeds; it is a rich, multi-layered symphony, resonating with themes of resurrection, restoration, and the unstoppable power of God’s Kingdom.

As the steady rhythm of grace continues, may we tune our hearts to God’s song, trusting in His faithful work. May our lives be instruments of His peace, creating spaces of welcome and belonging, where the harmonies of love and mercy ring true.

We finish this short sermon series today. Together, the first three parables in (Mark 4), the Sower, the Lamp on a Stand, and the Growing Seed, reveal that God’s kingdom grows through the faithful hearing of His word fed by prayer, it shines visibly through those who live by it through connecting with others, and unfolds mysteriously but powerfully in God’s timing as the Spirit transforms us into Christlikeness.

Praise God!

Amen